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THE PAUPER, THE THIEF,

AND

THE CONVICT;

SKETCHES OF SOME OF THEIR HOMES,
HAUNTS, AND HABITS.

BY

THOMAS ARCHER,

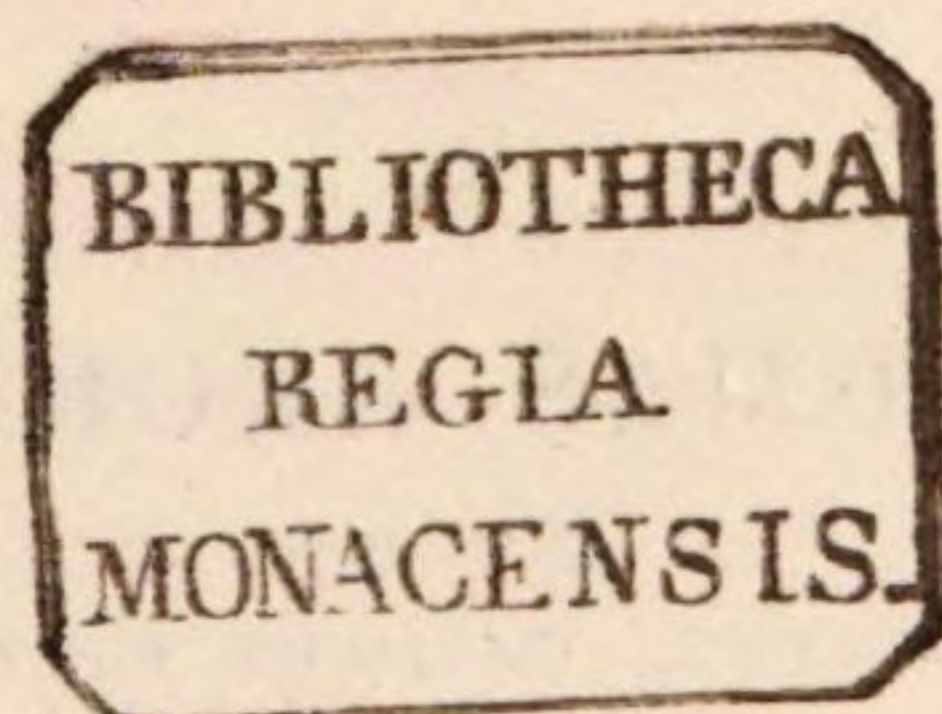
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THE PAUPER, THE THIEF, AND THE CONVICT.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IN London, there is little of the picturesque in poverty, still less of the romantic in crime. The records of the one are but monotonous recitals of sordid misery and destitution, which soon fail to interest the sentimentalist, and before the appalling extent of which even philanthropy too often shrinks dismayed: the annals of the other disclose that the criminal has about him nothing that is heroic, and that his life is for the most part a wretched mistake, full of poor shifts and expedients, while he himself is either a slinking pilferer or a cowardly though desperate ruffian, to whom any poor honest calling would afford, on the whole, a better hope even of physical comfort than a career which, while it gives him the opportunity for an occasional debauch, often includes long periods of suffering and want, and is attended with a constantly haunting fear which only a repeated experience of the gaol can convert into a temporary bravado.

Poverty and vice having been carefully tabulated, entered in statistical tables, analysed, totalled, and reported on with a scientific accuracy perfectly marvellous,

it would of course seem that nothing more remains to be done except by judicious tinkering to adapt our institutions, and particularly our laws, to the fresh discoveries of statisticians, and so ultimately to balance this folio of the National Ledger in a way which shall make things pleasant to all parties. Whether in spite of our wonderful mechanism of tabulation, and the reparative genius with which new pieces of social science cloth have been sewed into old garments of legislation, we have not occasionally broken down as to any very encouraging results, may be subject for sincere and earnest inquiry; but it is quite certain that there is another and more closely personal matter which demands very serious attention from English gentlemen and gentlewomen, who are God's stewards, whether they acknowledge the dignity of the office or not—and may be just or unjust in that capacity without being exonerated from its claims.

During some years of literary journeywork, in the completion of which I have tried with what power there is in me to learn some of those mysteries of London which have very seldom been revealed in print, and certainly have never appeared in penny numbers, I have felt a growing conviction that the failure of our institutions for the relief of poverty, and the punishment and eventual reformation of the criminal, may be attributed to the impersonal manner of their application.

While any attempt to concentrate governmental interference by giving authority to one ruling body, and dividing the cost of the administration equitably over the whole country—as would be the case, for instance, in equalisation of the poor-rates—is met with loud cries against centralisation as un-English and unconstitutional; the administration of the laws is too often left to incom-

petent boards and committees, who do centralise their powers in a way almost inconceivably mischievous, and employ utterly unscrupulous agents to carry out their evasions of the laws by which they profess to be bound.

This goes on, and the gentlemen of England who have shouted so bravely for our institutions continue to sit at home perfectly at ease, with the satisfactory reflection that they are not called upon to take part in that local government which, if it were conducted by the class who are best fitted by education and position to assert its claims, would have power to avert any danger which could arise from the centralisation so much dreaded.

Whatever excuse there may be for the sneer and the shrug with which allusions to the Vestry and the Board of Guardians are so frequently accompanied, it is to the disgrace of men of birth, position, and education, that parochial and corporate authority is engrossed, as it too often is, by those belonging to the most ignorant and the least independent class in England. By the provisions of the Poor Law, it was enacted that the guardians of the poor should be "chosen and appointed out of the noblemen and gentlemen, inhabitants of each parish," and only in case there were no inhabitants who were entitled to be called noble or gentle did the law direct that "then the said guardians should be chosen out of the principal and most respectable inhabitants." Unless, indeed, the noblemen and gentlemen refused to serve, and unless they had good reason for refusing, the Act left them but little excuse for such a breach of duty, since it especially mentions that they were to be elected "in order the more effectually to guard against all dangerous consequences which may arise from false parsimony, negligence, inadvertency, or the annual change of parish officers."

Would it be too much to say that, if the noblemen or gentlemen were to hold those offices which were originally assigned to them, we should hear a little less frequently of those cases which now greet us almost every day in the newspapers under the head of "shocking destitution," where whole families would rather suffer all the pangs of disease and famine than drag their failing limbs to the workhouse door, there to cower before officials too anxious to oblige the board, who are too anxious to oblige the ratepayers, to do more than offer as deterrent a front as possible to want and misery?

Would it be too much to ask whether it is a less noble office to take a part in the administration of the law in its most beneficent, and therefore its best and highest meaning, than to seek for a place in the assembly where the laws are made? or whether, even if this be so, it can be other than a noble thing to do God's work—even though that work is the duty that lies nearest?

But there is a duty for those who hold no recognised office whatever. If we really believe that we shall one day, in some way or other, be reminded of those who were hungry and thirsty, sick and in prison, shall we be able to excuse neglect on the ground that we did not think they were people of so much consequence—or that we thought it might be allowable to subscribe a trifle, and so leave somebody else to look after them?

Bare, unpicturesque, and sordid as are the conditions of poverty, there are sights in London which everybody may and should see—sights which are sometimes touched upon in newspaper articles, or in the chapters of sensation stories, but whose dread meaning and fullest horror lie in that very blank routine of misery which most lacks interest.

The ragged schools have done much, and the proposed visitation of ladies to the wards of unions may do much, especially if they are made judiciously; but incalculably more may be effected by every one recognising the work that lies next his hand, and visiting his or her own union now and then, with a silent tongue, but a keen eye for the master, and a few kind words and an encouraging look for the inmates. One great scandal has already been removed by the recent enactment, which provides that the casual poor shall no longer be permitted to stand or crouch starving at the workhouse doors; but much remains to be done, and the Metropolitan Board of Works, in whose hands is placed the duty of providing a night's lodging and a meal for the vagrant pauper, will have to concern itself not only with increased accommodation, but with some sort of dietary regulation which shall suffice to snatch fainting women and children from the jaws of death, by better means than mere bread and water.

In describing two workhouses that I have visited, I have chosen those conducted on a liberal interpretation of the Poor Laws. That there are others where the wretched inmates are neglected and reduced to the condition of mere animals, or almost to the level of the idiots whose companions they are, but who are perhaps less miserable than they, cannot well be doubted in the face of scores of facts which have from time to time been made known: that to keep out the starving wretches who seek admittance, and to abide by "regulations" which leave the poor to die, because they prescribe medical aid only on condition of fatal delay and difficulty, is the plan by which more than one set of union officials have become infamous with impunity, it is our shame to know, without also knowing that a wholesome indignation has swept away the reproach for ever. It

would, perhaps, be too much to expect that every one should visit the scenes some of which I have endeavoured to depict in the following pages. Indeed but few people could visit them without much difficulty and some danger, but we all have it in our power to reduce their number by forwarding education, and insisting on the reform of abuses whenever we can discover them. So intimately, indeed, are the paupers, the poor tenants of the "bad neighbourhoods," and the criminals associated, that the recognition of their duties by the gentlemen who should be guardians of the poor would do much to mitigate the incalculable evils brought about by foul dwellings and undrained hovels, where poverty weds crime, and brings forth fruit that ripens for the gallows. The repressor of the unwilling pauper is often the owner of those foul tenements which disgrace the parish, or is, at all events, so intimately acquainted with the parochial authorities that they are bound to "make things pleasant," even to the yearly sacrifice of a few score human lives, and the infection of an entire district. In the sore need of some scheme of national education every respectable inhabitant of a parish may do something towards rescuing at least one child from the brutish ignorance to which private selfishness and official negligence would often leave it, and may help to teach it something beside that which awaits it either in the workhouse or the gaol.

How urgent is the need for some teaching apart from either may be gathered from some of those statistics of which the only satisfactory use is to point out *where* the remedy is needed, and *what* remedy shall be sufficient.

From the "Criminal Returns" published by the authorities at Scotland Yard, and not including those of the City Police, it appears that there were taken into custody

during last year 64,760 persons (about twice as many males as females) of whom only a few, by comparison, were under fifteen years of age. Out of this number only 2760 could read or write well (only 173 of these being women), 46,533 could read only, or read and write imperfectly; while 9132 could do neither, and only 86 were well taught. Of 32,676 summarily disposed of by the magistrates, or held to bail, 8024 could neither read nor write, 23,334 could do so but imperfectly, and 1277 could do both, while 41 had received superior instruction. Of 2906 tried and convicted, 607 could neither read nor write; 2,077 could read only, or read and write but imperfectly, and only 217 could do both well; 5 only having received superior instruction.

Regarding two of the subjects which are concerned in the foregoing remarks it may be necessary to say a word. Those who visit the poor would do well to abstain alike from authoritative interference and from indiscriminate almsgiving. Both are evils, and it would be difficult to say which is the worst, though they both aim at the independence of the poor, and reduce them against their better disposition to the level of degraded pauperism. Those who help them to help themselves are their truest benefactors; and the past Session of Parliament has been distinguished by the most conspicuous statesman of his time in his recognition of what is due to the working classes of this country by the introduction of the Government Annuities and Life Assurance Bill, the benefits of which would be incalculable if it only proved to the labourer—as it does—that the Government cares for him; but the influences of which are indefinitely extended by the advantages of a secure investment for the savings of some of the more fortunate and the more frugal members of a class which has

so long needed examples of prudence within its own ranks. In order to extend the benefits of this provision, would it be difficult for gentlemen who are employers to help on their own people in this direction by advancing a year's premium, or the nucleus of a future provision, to a working man, as a reward of good and steady conduct?

It may be noticed that, even within the limits of a single volume, I might have said something of "fences," or receivers of stolen goods; or have noticed more particularly some of the phases of juvenile depravity in the metropolis.

With regard to the first it is only necessary to state that, wherever there is a thief colony, there are receivers—at marine-store shops, at brokers' shops, in the cellars of lodging-houses, and elsewhere; and that the melting-pot is always on the fire for the making of golden or silver soup. The method in which thieves are kept and trained differs little from that which obtained when our great novelist wrote for us an account of the doings of Mr. Fagin, Charley Bates, and the Artful Dodger. But it so happens that Mr. Fagin now sometimes keeps a common lodging-house, and that—to appear respectable—he provides his pupils with pencils, oranges, memorandum-books, or some small wares for sale. He is still held in such awe by his satellites, that they would go to prison, to save him from the clutches of the law; and he passes amongst them by the endearing appellation of "Father." Of juvenile crime, the only way to reduce the amount is by an early transplantation of the youthful criminal to a better soil, and a strict and determined execution of some law which shall punish either the cadgers who hold a property in these infant thieves, or the parents who sacrifice them to their own selfish and unnatural profit.

II.

AMONGST THE POOR.

ANYBODY whose acquaintance with Bethnal Green commenced more than a quarter of a century ago, will remember that some of those names of streets and rows which now seem to have such a grimly sarcastic meaning expressed, not inaptly, the places to which they originally referred. Hollybush Place, Green Street, Pleasant Place, and other neighbourhoods, which now consist of ruinous tenements, reeking with abominations, were outlying, decent cottages, standing on or near plots of garden ground, where the inmates reared prize tulips and rare dahlias in their scanty leisure, and where some of the last of the old French refugees dozed away the evenings of their lives in pretty summer-houses, amidst flower-beds gay with virginia stocks and creeping plants.

At this time, and before the present main road was formed to supersede the old Bethnal Green Road, which lies nearer to Cambridge Heath, this district was but a sort of country extension of Spitalfields; for Spitalfields had begun to assume the appearance that it exhibits now that its worst features have been exceeded by the wretched maze of streets and alleys which have built all greenness, except that belonging to rottenness, out of Bethnal. It may be remarked that the worst parts of Bethnal Green are not those inhabited by weavers, and that wherever the weaver is found, his general appearance, and the tidiness

of his poor room, offer a striking contrast to those of many of his neighbours. His work requires a "long light," or leaden casement, so that he most frequently occupies garrets, originally designed for his trade. Poor, suffering, nearly starved, and living in a house which shares with the rest the evils of bad or no drainage, and insufficient water supply, his business requires at least some amount of personal cleanliness, for the delicate fabrics on which he is employed could never come out unsullied from the touch of coarser hands.

Skirting the station of the Great Eastern Railway, in Shoreditch, and traversing Club Row—the Sunday morning resort of pigeon and bird fanciers—the earnest visitor has only to cross the road and turn up Nichols Row, to find himself in as foul a neighbourhood as can be discovered in the civilised world (savage life has nothing to compare to it), and amongst a population depressed almost to the last stage of human endurance. Should he have started with an impression that report had exaggerated the misery of these dwellings, he will, if he have the heart and the stomach to inspect them, prove that no allowable strength of language could do more than adequately express the condition of the dens which surround Friars Mount. It is true that several of the main thoroughfares, though dirty and ruinous enough, do not indicate externally the teeming and filthy rooms, which can only be appreciated by a closer inspection. Even though here and there a falling tenement is propped up by a shoreing-beam, to prevent the wall from bulging over into the street, there are still the remains of poor respectability in some places; and ragged, dirty children, and gaunt women, from whose faces almost all traces of womanliness have faded, alternate with the clean-looking and even well-dressed families of

some of the shopkeepers. Let the traveller penetrate further, and he will enter upon a maze of streets, each of which is a social crime, and each of which contains tributary hovels many degrees worse than itself. They are not always easy to find, since, if they have ever had any names, the names have been obliterated, except from the memory of the police or the City missionary, the doctor or the landlord; and the entrance to most of them is by a covered alley, not wider than an ordinary doorway—nay, sometimes so narrow that a brewer's drayman would be compelled to walk in sideways.

At the end of this blind court there will be found either a number of black and crumbling hovels, forming three sides of a miserable little square, like a foetid tank, with a bottom of mud and slime; or an irregular row of similar tenements, mostly with four small rooms, fronted by rotten wooden palings. In either case there are three peculiarities which are common to a great part of the whole neighbourhood.

The two or three places of convenience, common to the entire row or square, are in front of the houses. The water supply is obtained from a single tap, which increases the mud in one dirty corner for an hour or so a day, when it is besieged by slipshod haggard-looking women, and prematurely old children, bearing every possible variety of vessel, in which to hoard the precious liquid. The drainage of the hovels is so imperfect as to be practically useless. It may be easily imagined in what a state water collected in open vessels will be found, after having been kept for a night in a room, where a whole family is crowded together, without the means of common decency or cleanliness.

Add to these conditions the decay of vegetable matter,

the occasional evidence of the presence of pigs in adjacent houses, which have back yards (these particular tenements have none), and that insufferable sickly odour which always belongs to human beings living in such a state, and the result will represent a score of places extending over a whole district for more than a mile in length, and half a mile in breadth.

The locality of FRIARS MOUNT, which is nominally represented by three streets, named respectively Old Nichols, Nichols, and Half Nichols, includes perhaps, most obviously a great part of the vice and debauchery of the neighbourhood; such vice as may be exhibited amongst the poorest class of prostitutes and their paramours, who are mostly thieves of the common filching sort.

Many of the houses in the main thoroughfares (the three streets just mentioned) have been originally built for weavers, and have the appearance of an original respectability, which could scarcely have lasted till the plaster was dry upon their walls. Many of them are now propped up with timber shoreings, and threaten either to fall in upon their inhabitants, or to bulge outwards upon the roadway.

There is little distinction in the condition of the people or of their rooms, however, whether they half live by vice, or half starve at such poor trades as can be carried on in such a place. The dark, steep, broken, and filthy stairs, the black and crumbling ceilings, the bare and broken walls, show no effort on the part of anybody to render them tenantable. Undrained, unwashed, and scantily supplied with water, the rooms underlet to such an extent, that one wretched garret (unfurnished, except with a rude bedstead or two, and some filthy bedding) will be made

to contain ten persons, each house, from garret to cellar, is full of evil influences.

There is nothing picturesque in such misery; it is but one painful and monotonous round of vice, filth, and poverty, huddled in dark cellars, ruined garrets, bare and blackened rooms, teeming with disease and death, and without the means, even if there were the inclination, for the most ordinary observations of decency or cleanliness. In the neighbourhoods where the inhabitants follow poor trades, the condition is but little better; a few streets where there is a more cleanly appearance do but lead to a repetition of the horrors just witnessed; and from garret to cellar whole families occupy single rooms, or, if they can find a corner of available space, take a lodger or two. In some wretched *cul de sac*, partly inhabited by costers, the foetid yards are devoted to the donkeys, while fish are cured and dried in places which cannot be mentioned without loathing. Bandbox and lucifer-box makers, cane workers, clothes'-peg makers, shoemakers, and tailors, mostly earning only just enough to keep them from absolute starvation, swarm from roof to basement; and, as the owners of such houses have frequently bought the leases cheaply, and spend nothing for repairs, the profits to the landlords are greater in proportion than those on a middle-class dwelling.

It may be asked how people can long endure such a condition of physical wretchedness. The question is difficult to answer; but it is certain that they will endure almost anything rather than "go into the house," that is, than become Union paupers. And recent revelations have shown that even the utmost misery and starvation are not sufficient credentials for relief in the Bethnal Green Union, unless certain difficult forms are first recognised, so that

while the parochial officers have been quarrelling, the poor have died, waiting for the settlement of their disputes. Some of the people here can earn no more than from six to ten shillings a week, and on this as many children have to subsist. Of what their food is composed can only be known on close inquiry, even when they apply for, and obtain, the dole of parish bread.

The places to which public attention was first drawn during the inquiry into the condition of the dwellings of the poor in this district are bad enough. THOROLD SQUARE, with its muddy area and foetid pump, was a disgrace to civilisation.

HOLLYBUSH PLACE, in the vicinity of foul cowsheds and sties where pigs added their special filthiness, and their special diseases to the district, was a shame to humanity; but in FRIARS MOUNT, and at the other extremity of the parish in TWIG FOLLY, there are horrors exceeding all that these places have or had then to show, and in the latter neighbourhood the presence of noxious trades is superadded.

I have already spoken of the difficulty in guessing what can be the food on which these people live, and the sties, cowsheds, and slaughter-houses suggest to the inquiring mind a terrible association with the large number of shops where the coarsest parts of meat seem to share the space with what butchers call offal. Cow-heels, bullocks'-hearts, kidneys, and livers, thin and poor-looking tripe, and sheeps-heads are amongst the uncooked portion of the stock; while the cooked viands are represented by piles and chains of bruised, and often damaged-looking, save-loys, black-puddings, and a sort of greasy cakes of baked sausage-meat, known as "faggots," sold for a penny or three farthings, and made of the haslet and other internal portions of the pig. It is often the case that these

shops have some display of joints of meat, coarse, poor, and flabby-looking, but they bear no proportion to the staple trade. It would be curious to inquire how many Bethnal Green pigs, or if any Bethnal Green cows, ever find their way to a regular dead-meat market, there to come under the observation of an authorised inspector.

Of what quality is the milk which comes from those sheds so close to fever-haunted courts? From what sty comes the pork which is used to make up these cheap and ready-cooked viands to which people resort who have but twopence to spend, and a fireless grate at home?

I have written the word "home," but it is almost impiety to associate with it any meaning which can attach to the dens of Bethnal Green. Their existence is a national crime, and that they have existed for so long is pretty plain evidence that they will yield to nothing short of direct legislative interference.

Of the miserably poor inhabitants of this district, a very large number are occasional paupers, receiving out-door relief, when they can contrive to fulfil the conditions which are imposed before the relieving officer receives their names for the parish dole of bread. It is often the case that those members of the family who get work could support themselves even by such poor trades as I have mentioned; but there are numerous instances in which the earnings of a family consisting of four or five persons, only enables them to pay half-a-crown a week for their single foul room, bare of all furniture save a broken chair or two, and a heap of ragged bedding, and some straw or shavings thrust into a tattered sack, occupying a place on the floor in each corner. In a very recent case where the death of one of the family (a man of middle age) brought the matter under public notice, the amount on which four

persons were compelled to live, had not for some time exceeded nine shillings and sixpence a week. It has happened that the parochial authorities have refused to admit sick or dying persons except on the condition that the relatives who can only just support themselves should enter the union also, and thus relinquish such employment as they have been able to obtain.

The utter repugnance of many amongst the poor to become paupers, in the sense of a residence in the Union, may be inferred from the sufferings to which they continually submit rather than avail themselves of the provision which was intended not only as a privilege, but as a public right.

Amongst all the homes of the poor in the districts of Bethnal Green and Spitalfields, those occupied by the weavers are, perhaps, on the whole, the cleanest, though not always the least indicative of utter poverty.

There are, in fact, whole streets of old-fashioned houses (some of them of considerable size) where the upper floors are lighted by long leaden casements, extending for the whole width of the rooms. Here the click of the shuttle may be heard all day long while the weaver has work to do. When he is "at play" (the term used to express the period while he is waiting for a fresh "piece" or "cane," as the web of silk is technically called), his time is spent in waiting his turn at the warehouse of his employer till he obtains work again. Unfortunately the cheapness of the French and German silk and velvet which is now exported free of duty, and the operation of the country factories as well as those of the large towns, have combined to reduce the London weavers to a very deplorable condition. The "play time" which formerly denoted a time of relaxation while fresh work was being prepared,

now signifies a fireless hearth and hungry children. The boys and girls of weavers who are unfortunate enough to follow the same calling, are first taught to wind silk on small pieces of reed placed on a spindle. These, when covered with silk or cotton, are known as "quilles" (perhaps from *quenouille*), and are placed in the shuttle to supply the woof. When these boys and girls go out to work to assist other weavers, they are known as "week" boys or girls (heaven knows this would generally be true if the word were spelled with an *a*), and their wages vary from a shilling to half-a-crown a week according to their ability, with the addition of a pint of tea or coffee morning and evening, but without food except such as they take with them. Stale bread and butter or dripping—penn'orths of that unctuous and pasty pudding which may be seen in all the cookshops of this neighbourhood, and an occasional (very occasional) basin of leg-of-beef soup, a saveloy, or a plate of pieces, such as the trimmings and coarse fat of ham and brisket of beef, are their ordinary articles of diet. Their luxuries are baked potatoes, stewed eels dispensed by teacupfuls at street stalls, fried fish, and whelks, which are eaten with infinite gusto at a dozen stalls about Brick Lane and Shoreditch. I have already mentioned the shops for the sale of offal. Many of these may supply some really good articles of food—amongst which may be classed cows' heels and those baked sheep's heads, the appetising steam from which, as they frizzle in the long japanned kettles, salutes the nostrils of many an expectant family who have been hungry all the week, and look forward to this as the crown and reward of their week's work on Saturday night. It may readily be believed that in a business where all the family must, if they are fortunate

enough to obtain employment, help to keep the wolf from the door—the cookshop is a convenient substitute for the kitchen of more favoured households. To leave the loom or the silk wheel, and to light a fire and cook a meal for a family in the room where work is going on, often would be a loss of time and no little inconvenience. It would be difficult too, in any way to obtain more than a taste of meat for the few halfpence which they have to spend. No, the cookshop, with its mingled steams and mixed flavours of many meats; its great slabs of pease-pudding; its long rolls of “spotted” or “plain”; its baked potatoes and gravy; its ha’poths of “pie-crust”; flat, damp, hot, flabby slabs of greasy dough, four inches square; its “faggots” and dense peppery saveloys, supplies the immediate wants of these people during half the week at least, that is to say—with many of them—during the time that they are not absolutely starving on such slender additions as they can make to the coarse workhouse loaf.

Their rooms are frequently tidy, although they are often badly ventilated, and pervaded by a strong ammoniacal smell from the animals which most of them keep, whether they be pigeons, white mice, cats, rabbits, fancy dogs, or singing birds. Of these, pigeons and singing birds are the most common, the former being kept in the lofts, and flying from dormers on the tiles, where their masters spend a great part of their spare time, and notably their Sunday mornings. The birds hang here and there upon the walls, in breeding-cages, or carol outside the long garret windows, trying to drown the click of the shuttle, or the whistle of the cutter as it severs the silk upon the long grooved wire used for making the velvet pile.

In one of these long “shops” a whole family and all

their live stock will sometimes live, and yet the delicate fabric upon which they work will come out from the loom without a soil. Amidst the turned up stump bedsteads or the roll of blankets on the floor, the few pieces of broken crockery, and the rickety furniture, some of which is generations old, there is often seen some sort of order and decency which is worthy of a better fortune; and as the patient men and women stand and remove from the long silken band every knot and burr, or sit at the loom, laboriously weaving in the bright soft tints, we cannot but wonder at the fortitude which such a life demands, and at the honesty which, under such conditions, may be trusted with commodities so valuable. It may be believed to what a state of depression a trade must have come, when those who follow it speak of it, and of themselves in connection with it, in a sort of apologetic disparagement.

Meeting one of these people anywhere casually, and as casually asking him what calling he follows, the answer would be, in nine cases out of ten—

“Me! Oh, I’m only a weaver.”

While the same inquiry regarding a son or daughter would be met with—

“Well, sir, only follerin’ my own trade, if you can call it a trade, but we’re in the hopes of a somethink better for ’em.”

I can remember Bethnal Green and Spitalfields in better times, when “a weavers’ strike” was an occasional event, and masters and men established what was called the “book price,” or a definite rate of payment per yard, according to the quality of the silk and the labour required.

There is sometimes even now a feeble remonstrance exhibited by a meeting of the hands of one or other of the

manufacturing houses, either in Spital Square or in some of the streets abutting on Spitalfields Market; but the word "strike" seems too vigorous an expression to denote their proceedings. They are, in the main, not ignorant people, and they know that their condition cannot well be remedied in the face of the present free importations of foreign goods, and the facilities for manufacture, with still cheaper labour, abroad and in the provinces.

Some faint traditions of a much earlier time still occur to me, when the weavers were the immediate descendants of those brave, gay, light-hearted *émigrés*, some of whom learned of their lady wives to make lace on pillows, and so earned an honorable subsistence. In their day Bethnal Green was, as I have said, an outlying, countrified suburb of the town, which ended at Shoreditch, where it stretched towards Hogsden Fields. In their day, too, the weaver who worked five days a week might wear his laced coat on Sunday, and play his game or two of bowls in an afternoon. There were old songs in the old French tongue, old courtesy, old love for birds and flowers, which has survived amongst their degenerate descendants; old china and such other quaint waifs and strays, the flotsam and jetsam of former domestic shipwreck, as they brought with them in their exile.

Ah! even the last shreds and shards of these may be seen sometimes in the weaver's garret of to-day. A cracked china cup, an ivory carving, a silver-keyed flute, a flawed and riveted punch-bowl, a pair of spectacles, a scrap or two of old point lace—such things have I seen here and there; but, like the language in which their forefathers lamented and rejoiced, these tangible reminiscences are almost lost, even to such as are the veritable descendants of the old refugees. Their names alone record the relation-

ship, and they have often been twisted into a vulgar look by misspelling. Two years ago I used to notice a board outside a window near Club Row, amidst the pigeon shops, which intimated that there was, somewhere close by, "A Day School both in French and English," but I miss it to-day, and the last remnant of the old weaver colony seems to have floated away with it, as on a raft, into the great sea of oblivion.

I have said that the names of some of the people are all that is left of their origin, but I am mistaken. The name of many of the tools, and portions of machinery used in their craft retains traces of its French origin, from the "tantot," with which the web is pulled forward, to the "trevat," with which the silk is cut to form the pile of velvet. The weavers, however, are less numerous in Bethnal Green than in Spitalfields, and in the streets which lie between the two, and their numbers are diminishing, for the trade seems to be dying out in London.

The "week boys," but more notably the bird, dog, and pigeon-fanciers, make up a part of that assembly of men, boys, and hulking youths (mostly in velveteen cord, and with greasy caps pulled over their sleek hair), which pervades the neighbourhood of Club Row on Sunday forenoons. From the marshes, or from still further afield, where they have been pegging for chaffinches, or jingling robins, or netting larks—from the tops of neighbouring high-pitched roofs, where they have been looking after "strays" (erratic pigeons), or from some convenient public-house, where "a party has been arskin arter a little dorg o' the tarrier sort," the individuals comprising this crowd come at about church time; and here they lounge about, exchange or sell birds and pigeons, criticise dogs, make appointments for a singing match between rival birds at the

“Queen of Spades,” in Hare Street, or arrange the next pigeon-flying contest from ‘Ornsey-wood ‘Ouse to certain dormers near Mr. Barber’s shop in Club Row.

In the afternoon they reappear with their shoes highly polished, their faces bearing the evidence of soap and water, and their side locks ingeniously curled and scented with “rose-oil,” the favorite unguent of the district, and until dark they may be seen spread over Victoria Park, listlessly looking at the water over the coping-stones of the bridges near Temple Mills, or lying on their faces in the long grass of the marshes beyond Homerton. Such of them as can obtain a vehicle, or get a seat in one, drive, by way of the Lea-Bridge Road, to Epping Forest, and enjoy their beer and long pipes at High Beech or the Roebuck, much to the annoyance of harmless pedestrians, to whom they make the night hideous by their furious and reckless driving, and by the strange cries and half-tipsy oaths which they leave, as it were, floating behind them in the clouds of dust raised by the rickety wheels of their overloaded carts and costermonger’s barrows.

Many of these, if not thieves, are at the same time amongst that dangerous class which is found occupying a position between the pauper and the convict. At present they “have a job of work” somewhere, and do it; in a week or two they may be amongst that large class of the London population who “go out to look after a job,” and to do them justice are willing to work if they can find work to do; but who, failing in its discovery, have too little moral restraint to go back to their miserable lodging with an empty stomach if they can “*find*” anything which will procure them a meal. It appears to me, as I watch a group of these fellows: shambling, tight trousered, sleek haired, artful, but yet hulking youths of

seventeen or eighteen; that they are in the long run more expensive than paupers, and more dangerous than either thief or convict. They utterly decline to seek for or to accept parochial assistance, "they know a trick worth two of that," as one of them says; "only jest ketch me at it—tried it once when we was all kids, and the whole lot went into the house, and I ain't never had no stomach for skilley (workhouse gruel) since; still if you like to pay for a pint o'beer I aint no ways pertikler, and I haven't had a drop since yesterday, s'elp me." Now, it is just the younger of such as these who come from pauperdom itself into a condition which must, unless by extraordinary accident, lead to crime. What becomes, I would ask, of the foundling—the deserted infant—whose only parent is the parish, whose home is the workhouse ward? What *may* become of him depends very considerably on the particular parish in which it may be his lot to be cast away. It may be a haven, or a quicksand on which a life is flung to lie a wreck thenceforth. There will be great chance of the latter, if instead of teaching him a trade under a competent master, he is merely taught to botch at some common journeywork set him by a teacher, who for a wretched stipend and his rations, fulfils the place of "instructor" in this, that, or the other calling. The boy so mistaught comes out from the imprisonment of the four bare walls, into the wide wilderness of the barer streets, and being unable to compete with those who know so much more than he, takes up any casual work, or hangs about purposeless and hungry till he gets a job by some lucky chance.

His career is often too soon told; the casual meal, the common lodging-house, where his threepenny bed may be next to that of an old thief, the deadening of such moral

influences as he may have brought with him from "the parish"; the companionship which keeps him on that debateable ground which lies between the workhouse and the jail; and at last, except in rare cases, a lodging in some foul room in a tenement filled with those who are worse and further on the road to crime than he—a room with no furniture save a table and two broken chairs, and a heap of ragged bedding and a creaking bedstead; a room in which the windows are half glass, half rags—where the grate is fireless and rusty, and the very rats starve, so barren is the whole wretched tenement of food;—though thirty living souls, and perhaps one or two dead bodies may all be there to-night, and every night, under one roof.

This lodging may be in Nicholl's Street, Bethnal Green, or in Little Kate Street, Spitalfields, or in the foul, fever-haunted courts about Gray's Inn Lane, or it may be in the purlieus of Somer's Town, or away near Kensington, or in a blind, quiet alley behind the glare and bustle of Whitechapel, say near Flower and Dean Street, or about "Tiger Bay," and Bluegate Fields, or in Southwark, in one of the shattered tenements where the landlord takes the rents under protest from some Chancery litigant, and the "Fence" waits warily day and night for stolen goods.

In whichever of these places he takes up a lodging of his own, he will probably share it with a girl, a mere child of thirteen perhaps, who is half street hawker half prostitute, just as he is half casual labourer half thief. They may live together till both go several steps downward, and he becomes known to the police as a regular pickpocket and filcher; while she no longer sells any wares except in occasional seasons of bad luck, but is either seen flaunting on the streets, or follows his business

and her own together, adopting him as her "fancy." It matters little to which of these districts they may betake themselves; in all of them the rooms are equally foul, and bare, and dirty; in each, the streets have a strong family likeness in their dirty pavements, their sunken steps, their blurred and mud-stained windows, patched with newspapers and stuffed with rags; their broken and rickety stairs, their foul landings, their poisonous exhalations from choked drains, and reeking cesspools and decaying filth; their teeming inhabitants who stare sullenly from the fetid cellars, or whose infants may be seen on the topmost stair; above all, in the pale, sickly children with worn, old faces and bent limbs, in the slipshod, angry, shrill women who sit and stand about the doorways, or congregate at the gin-shop, which is already flaring with gas on a hot summer's afternoon, an hour before dark; in the brutal or half drunken ruffians who regard the passer-by with the look which seems to inquire of themselves or their companions whether robbery and violence are worth their while; in the slinking figures which one sees for a moment, in doorways, round corners, at the threshold of the public-house, but seldom in it—speaking to clean but shabby women, some of them with black eyes, others with babies at their breasts; few of them, and these mostly the Irish, with any covering for their heads—the Irish adhering to their habit of wearing the shawl as a hood—in some or all such particulars do these neighbourhoods attain a bad pre-eminence.

The figures—mostly of men—which I have alluded to as appearing with something of a stealthy movement, are thieves. Not young cadgers, like him who was lately from the workhouse, but regular thieves of the ordinary stamp—the thieves of "Thief London" in fact, not the known

“cracksman.” He and his like (for they are few) take furnished lodgings and live anywhere—Camden Town, Hackney Road, Islington, and, for aught I know (but I think it likely), in Kensington. Not the forgers, for they are criminal according to circumstances, and belong to no particular class. Not the coiners, though some of these have been engaged in that business, and many of them have been concerned in passing bad money; but the coiners live here, or elsewhere, according to their convenience, and seldom in any place so well known to the police and so often visited by them. No, these are the regular thieves—pickpockets, magsmen, sharpers, when they can sport a respectable “get up;”—shop-lifters, highway robbers or footpads (garotters, as it is now become customary to call them) are of a rather different stamp, but often grow from similar materials to those which have helped to form the casual thief whose case I have been considering; they are stolid, bullet-headed ruffians very often, and the women with black eyes and sharp tongues, and ready oaths, are their women;—often either regular prostitutes, or the keepers of low brothels, to which their particular paramours act as bullies, or help to secure the plunder of some drugged or drunken victim. They can always have the help of counsel—these fellows; and while her fickle attachment lasts, the woman, who is the terror of half the screaming wild cats of the neighbourhood, will endure blows, and cruelty, and drunken extravagance, and will, in short, bear almost any ill-treatment from her male “pal”; but let him “take up with another poll,” and if he have any cause to fear, he had better choose some fresh locality.

To go back to the regular thieves; they are so much more numerous than the rest that I have counted eleven

as I stand here by the corner, and know that I am the cause of their uneasy shifting hither and thither, and that they are watching me as closely as I am looking at them.

Theirs is a poor trade. Its poverty is manifest by their threadbare or coarse and mended clothes, the superficial cleanliness of their appearance notwithstanding; by the shabby, earnest-eyed, depressed women who share their fortunes; by their own almost gloomy looks—looks sometimes so wistful and anxious, that it would be difficult to imagine them in any condition which would induce them to make merry. They are not all marked by this demeanour, but this is the prevailing expression; and well it may be, for stealing in a “regular” way is doubtless as poor and ill-paid a business as one could enter into. Not even with habits of economy—and few London thieves can afford to be extravagant—will one in fifty succeed in saving any considerable sum. His “chances” must be good to keep him in more than the mere necessities of life, and he has no opportunity for luxuries.

How many times do we hear of a thief (a regular professed thief) being drunk, for instance, or of wearing fine clothes, except in the way of his profession, or of smoking choice cigars, or dining off whitebait and ducks and green peas? In these latter articles I believe they are at times a little extravagant; but a first-rate dinner is a rare event with them. The lucky ones who are clever as sharpers, or the hotel swindlers—a class by themselves, who occupy quiet lodgings or furnished houses in various districts—often live luxuriously; but the ordinary thief seldom rises above very plain eating, and exceedingly moderate drinking. They are often in “trouble,” and though they are generally willing to help each other, the savings of a few months may be expended in the cost of a defence, and the

amount necessary to start afresh after a period of imprisonment. I have said before that there are now no "thieves' kitchens," where ruffians of more or less truculence meet and carouse as they talk over their achievements, and devise new schemes of plunder; there are, however, public-houses in Thief London. I have one in my eye at this moment; it lies in the direction of Dock-head, and a shabby, dirty, half-ruinous, ill-stocked, and melancholy-looking establishment it is; as I pass the bar, I look round for the tap-room, and not finding it, follow the eye of the landlord, who has been half-sullenly and quite silently regarding me from behind his beer-engine. His eye involuntarily directs me to a dirty door at the end of a passage—a door which leads down a step to a large room, where there is a wide kitchen range, and a few wooden seats against the bare walls, the original colour of which is no longer distinguishable from that of the dirty tables, besmirched with stale beer, with which several flies, oppressed with some evil influence about the place, are irrigating a field of stale tobacco-ash. Sitting at a table near the grate, where a dull fire is struggling through a superstructure of cinders, sadly in need of the poker, which has been taken away, sit five young men. They have not come there to drink, for there is neither pot nor glass before one of them, and to judge from their general appearance they scarcely seem to have met with any intention of making merry, for they are leaning with their elbows on the table, and speaking only at long intervals and in a weary and dissatisfied undertone, suggestive of low spirits and general dissatisfaction. They are singularly alike even in the matter of dress, though one wears a threadbare coat, a size or two too small, and buttoned up to meet a half-dirty cotton handkerchief which is

wound round his neck; and another, who is moodily scoring a table with the end of a burnt lucifer, has a horsey look, in consequence of a flapped fustian jacket, corduroys tight in the calf, and with what a "New-Cut" clothier advertises as "artful buttons at the bottom," and a frayed seal-skin cap. All of them are greasy at the elbows, bulgy at the knees, and exhibit a lounging hopelessness in their beetling brows, their furtive eyes, the occasional shuffling of their feet. They take no notice of me as I enter and take a seat in a corner near the door, but I can see, by that same shuffling of feet and a twitching of the shoulders which pervades the company generally, that they are quite conscious of the presence of a stranger. A face with deeply sunken eyes and an aggressive jaw, seems somehow familiar to me; and as he who wears the fustian raises his head with suddenly assumed indifference, I remember when and where I have seen him before. The when was one day last week, the where was a Gravesend steamer; and though on that occasion the horsey-looking individual wore a dirty-white great coat, which looked like an enlarged flannel waistcoat, and was enveloped, as to the neck, in a yellow worsted comforter, I recognise him as one of a select party of ruffians who were seeking some convenient spot to regale themselves with a prize fight, and landed at Erith for that purpose.

"'Ow was he—why, what d'ye think he was?" says this person, in a defiant voice, in answer to a subdued question from one of the others. "I tell yer he ain't arf knocked out o'time—not up, of course, he warn't, but he ain't much wuss than Bantam."

"I dunnow about that," replies an oily looking youth, who has got up pretending to look for the poker, but in reality to look at me; "it don't seem arf square, do it?"

“What ain’t square? what the (local substantive) do *you* know about it? Hark at Weasel” (this to the company, not including me). Public attention being thus directed to Weasel, who makes a feint of dancing a melancholy double shuffle on the hearth; the rest smile faintly, and one of them ventures to ask what the horsey one has “put upon it, as makes him so (adjective) cocky.” This produces so smart a retort, seasoned with adjectives allied to such inappropriate substantives, that were it not for two of the company who never raise their eyes from the table, and express no interest whatever except by another twitch of the shoulders, I should imagine that they are quite unconcerned at the presence of a stranger; as it is, I know perfectly well that their conversation is for the time directed to me, and that they affect to be talking of sporting matters, and affect it very badly. One of the silent youths rising presently, and going out at a door opposite to that by which I entered, I see that the room opens upon a disused stable-yard, at the end of which is a tumble-down shed, leading by a wooden ladder outside to an upper room which might once have been a loft. He comes back again directly, and makes some sort of signal with his fingers which directs attention to the other door, through which come two men, one of whom I at once identify as a principal in last week’s amusement. I identify him, notwithstanding the fact that his nose and mouth are swelled into one irregular contusion with a gap on one side, where a couple of teeth are missing—and that his eyes, which I remember were rather deeply sunk, are now nearly on a level with his cheek bones. I cannot help thinking how the characteristic expression of a face may remain even after the shape of the face has been altered, and compare him mentally to one of those toy

heads made of gutta percha, which may be squeezed into a dozen shapes without altering their identity. Two or three of the party rise listlessly as the new visitor approaches; but they give him no word of greeting, and not one of them relaxes his gloomy overhanging brows for more than a momentary expression of interest.

His least damaged eye regards me with as much indifferent and yet marked attention as he can conveniently throw into it, and he stops for an instant on his way to the table, so that I have time to notice that one arm of his rough overcoat hangs loose, while the hand belonging to it rests in a sling made of a bright silk handkerchief. With this exception he is muffled in innumerable wraps, and looks faint, his face assuming the colour of mildewed paste.

“Have you seen him?” says somebody, at last.

“Yes, I’ve seen him,” he replies, “an’ he’s agoin’ to get up.”

Not another word is said, but by some mysterious concert they go one after another out at the back door, the disabled ruffian leading the way, accompanied by his friend and supporter.

In five minutes I rise to go too by the way I came, and I only stay because one of the silent youths with the shiny elbows returns, looking straight before him, advances a pace or two, and after slowly carrying his eyes quite round the room, but not looking at me, vanishes without even the pretence of having forgotten anything.

III.

PAROCHIAL RELIEF.

HAVING once made up my mind to pay the place a friendly visit, I begin to fear that many of my former impressions may be dispelled.

Not that I ever associated it with much of luxury, or with other than a depressed sense of such enjoyments as might be found there; but I have sometimes heard a great shouting of boys, as I passed along the lane by the back wall, which, I am told, abuts on the playground; and I have a very lively recollection of certain large and deep fruit pies (rhubarb pies, or I am mistaken) which sent up fragrant odours on Sunday mornings, as they stood on the long white dressers beneath the half-opened windows of the kitchen. On such occasions, say on my way to church, or to a queer, old-fashioned chapel-of-ease—where the responses, beginning properly with the clergyman, but unequally prolonged by his followers, ended first with the national-school children,—most of the old men and women, clad in russet brown and blue check, were on *their* way to church too, or, in fulfilment of their “day out,” sunning themselves on the tombstones in the churchyard before they proceeded to visit such of their relations as were not either in some other churchyard, or in some other Union. There were cases I had heard, where paupers who had seen better days, and did not care to bring the workhouse livery to their children’s tables, kept a decent

suit at a friend's house, and for the day at least were quietly clad old persons, who lived, it was supposed, "upon their means." There were others, I have reason to know, who scarcely shrunk from mendicancy, and, failing to obtain small change from chance wayfarers in quiet nooks, where they lay in wait for them, would beg tobacco, or whine in mumbling accents for snuff.

These I have seen, towards evening, returning to the protection of the gate-porter, with an unnatural liveliness upon them, to be accounted for by ardent rather than by animal spirits, though, heaven help them, poor old creatures, they never have confessed to more than "half a pint of four ale," and "jest the least drop—a quartern and three outs amongst three on us"—of gin. Well, upon their temperate old heads, which seldom have to contend with anything stronger than tea, even half a pint of ale, and one of three "outs" would work a marvellous change; and to get away from the four walls of the workhouse ward for an entire day, even when they are a kindly shelter, is an event not without an intoxication of its own.

There are no rhubarb pies on the dressers to-day as I glance down into the kitchen, for it is not Sunday; but I can fancy the same odour wafted towards me as I pull the great bell-handle which hangs beside the gate, and wait for admittance.

The gate itself is a tremendous structure, covered all over with great iron clamps and bolts, and studded with polygonal-headed nails—a gate whose fearsome lock seems intended to hold a number of desperate prisoners in safe keeping, or to fasten up some cherished treasures hidden in a remote storehouse. I am happy to say that it is *not* designed (as I have known to be the case with similar gates

in other parishes) to keep out a still larger number of famished men and women, or to bar the common treasures of humanity and loving-kindness from dying mothers and helpless children, till they comply with the remorseless tests of those who bring shame and hate upon the very name of "Guardian" of the poor.

My Union is a great pile of brick, with those unsightly proportions, and that utter absence of anything but unsuggestive hopelessness which ordinarily characterise poor-law architecture; but it has the advantage of being removed from London streets. It is, in fact, situated at the very end of the main thoroughfare which composes one of the few remaining villages standing on the north-eastern rim of the great city, and opens by a lane, more or less green, to the marsh country, across which Dick Turpin used to ride after he had been on an expedition to the metropolis. Beyond this connection with Black Bess, a doubtful interest in a once famous fishery, where ardent anglers still believe in the existence of monstrous pike, and such a smack of learning as may belong to a theological seminary, also famous in its time, I know of nothing to distinguish the village but the Union, which is at once its glory and its strength, and is distinction enough for a place of fifty times the size.

Conscious that the bell has taken a mean advantage of me by continuing to clang with a persistence which is all the worse for its seeming to resound in some great empty space high up above the portal, I am admitted by an old porter, who wears a sort of undress pauper uniform, and would anywhere be distinguished for his rosy cheeks, which are all streaked with red, like a well-stored apple. He is a little lame, I notice, as he walks backwards to open the heavy gate, and if there is any expression of surprise on his

good-humoured but otherwise impassive face, he gets rid of it and me together, by referring my inquiries for "the Master" to one of two other old men, who stand quietly wondering what parochial accident can have brought me into that cool, shady, brick-paved courtyard, or whether I really expect to be invited to enter the doorway on the left, near which a neat parlour window is ornamented with some bright scarlet geraniums. The master is "about somewhere;" and while I am noticing that the parlour itself, from being, as it were, under the shadow of the gateway, lies in a dim, peaceful twilight, I am conscious, by a shuffling of feet and the deferentially inquiring glances of the three old gentlemen, who are evidently curious as to my business, that my message has been very promptly attended to.

Having been informed in an under tone, which, however, has nothing servile in it, that "master's not in the way, but that here's the matron," I make my apologies to a buxom lady, with a fresh-coloured, vigorous face, and a decided manner, which, taken in conjunction with a determined expression about her mouth, would be a little repellant, but for a kindly twinkle in her bright, dark eyes. "Discipline without unnecessary harshness, and humanity without sentiment," I say to myself, in a neat and appropriate manner, as I hand her a card.

She isn't put out a bit by my sudden request to look over the establishment. She thinks it necessary to mention that, as it's clearing-up day, I may not find everything in perfect order, and must excuse the presence of some of the women who are scouring the stairs; but apart from these slight drawbacks, she is very glad to see me, and to conduct me to that portion of the establishment over which she presides, after which I shall be consigned

to the master, who is at this moment engaged in receiving stores.

The nursery? The very name of a "nursery" seems almost inconsistent with the notion of a workhouse, but the appearance of the matron reassures me and I follow, not without pleasant anticipations, "Up stairs and down stairs," according to the burden of the old nursery rhyme.

Blue eyes, brown eyes, hazel eyes; fair, dark, plump, rosy, and only two or three pale faces; little pudgy legs, and dimpled arms and shoulders, showing beneath and over blue check frocks and pinafores;—all these belonging to some score or so of little ones, averaging three to five years old, in a long bare room, furnished with a few forms and low stools, and with a coloured print here and there upon the wall.

Floors and forms are all scrubbed to the last pitch of endurance, and the place smells fresh and sweet, and is at this moment ringing with the prattle of children's voices, which are hushed on my entrance by a juvenile providence—also in blue check—who has them in charge; her duty for the time being the care of these little creatures, who seem to love her; and order her hither and thither, and expect her to find helpful hands in their play, and consolation in their troubles, and generally rule her as children will rule those whom they love. At the moment she is in quest of a doll, which is being plaintively demanded by a little clear-skinned, ruddy fairy, with big blue eyes, that look with fearless inquiry at the matron as she calls to her.

I find that she is called Rhoda, and it requires very little penetration to discover that, beauty having the same influence everywhere, little blue-eyed Rhoda is a pet and

favorite amongst every man, woman, and growing girl in this great workhouse.

The look of half apologetic pride with which the girl who has her in charge releases her tiny hand and pushes her forward to return our greeting—the scarcely repressed glance of pitying admiration which beams for a moment in the matron's face as she stoops down to speak to the wee thing standing there, so poor in all but the love which moves the souls even of pauper men and women towards helplessness and innocence—these indicate a report, which I hear presently, to the effect that Rhoda is half spoilt. But, poor little thing, she is an orphan, only her old grandmother surviving of all the family, and she is here, too, amongst the women who are just now busy with the "cleaning up." Rhoda makes her pretty little courtesy, and lisps her little greeting (the great dark-blue eyes staring immoveably all the time, till they seem to grow wider and darker in their clear pearly setting), as I pass through the door, to the music of a verse which some of her companions are singing, and ascend a fresh flight of stairs to the real nursery, where the infant pauper first learns to crawl upon the workhouse floor. Two or three of them are busy at this exercise on a large rug before the fire, where, on a high "guard," some articles of baby apparel hang to air. The obtusely angular, aggressive faces, and the red hair of two of these little ones, proclaim their Irish origin, these peculiarities being more strongly presented by their mothers, who, with another woman, are engaged in nursing.

On the low check-covered beds, or on pillows placed upon the floor, other infants sprawl, or play with impromptu toys made up of bundles of rag—the most amusing and the safest plaything of all being, I am told

the sticks from a bundle of firewood, first inspected as to splinters. Some of these helpless little ones have neither father nor mother, save the parish—none to own them, at all events—for they have been picked up, slightly animate bundles of old clothes, under doorways, by the roadside, or at the workhouse porch, deserted very soon after birth, and left to the mercies of the police and the board of guardians. Sitting in a low chair, and evidently the presiding genius of this part of the establishment, is an elderly lady of that kind and degree of stoutness which causes her to resemble an irregularly shaped blue check double pin-cushion, from which some of the stuffing has escaped; her whole physical aspect is that of softness, all the angular parts of the human frame having in her case been rounded, or more properly speaking, padded by nature into the proper proportions for nursing. For, in truth, nursing is the business of her life, and has been any time during these forty years, eighteen of which she has passed in this Union as “monthly.”

Being curious to know how many units she had been instrumental in adding to the population—that is to say, chiefly to the pauper population, I am scarcely astonished, though perhaps at first a little startled, to learn that she don’t know, she’s sure, “but something like eight or nine hundred, or maybe more.” She knows that “there’s been a good deal too many of ’em;” but that conviction scarcely influences her in her attention to the poor weird looking little creature now seated on her short lap. It was deserted two nights ago—this child—and by its pinched, anxious-looking face, and wild, scared eyes, seems to my fancy to be vainly endeavouring to recall a dream of some previous state of existence from which it had been summoned, without at all understanding the reason.

I learn that this is frequently the appearance of these poor little castaways, and that they at first refuse to eat ; but in a few days they "settle down" happily enough amongst their brethren and sisters on the rug, or learn to stand by the legs of the iron bedsteads in the nursery, till they are old enough to be consigned to the room where blue-eyed Rhoda and her playmates are assembled, there to remain, it may be, till they attend the school which I am about to visit. First, however, I pass with bated footsteps through a passage belonging to two or three small rooms lying off from the nursery, and away from the general traffic of the building by a side stair. There are reasons for my visit being a little exceptional, and I enter one of these apartments, light, airy, and with hangings and furniture differing from the mere bare appurtenances of the ordinary ward. Here, in the white-curtained bed lies the mother of one of the latest additions to the nursery, for whom the contents of the saucepan I have noticed on the hob are intended. An open, fair, intelligent face—the face of a young woman, but with an expression which seemed like that of a quiet, innocent girl, just growing from childhood to womanhood. The best expression of an earlier time, as I think, coming back mysteriously with the other mysteries of maternity. There is no need to dwell upon the story of the poor pale fugitive lying here. It is the old, old story of grievous wrong and foolish trust, and vague terror prompting to who knows what of sin and misery. The old story of remorse and shame. The old story of impunity on one side, and degradation on the other. Thank God that the fugitive from the outraged decorum of rabid virtue, and from the treachery of successful vice has trusted not in vain to find a succour not altogether stern and unpitying. I linger

but a minute to speak a word or two of hope and comfort, for I can see traces of tears in the large dark eyes which look so wistfully at the door as we enter; but little can be said in the presence of so great a wrong, a wrong which time itself may fail to heal. Down to the basement story again, and along more passages, till the humming of boys' voices, and a strong smell of new corduroy tell me that I am approaching the school, a supposition which is verified by the sudden opening of a door, and the appearance of the schoolmaster, who seems to me to share very completely in the deference which everybody here pays to the matron. I say everybody here, and I am glad to notice the fact as a very proper indication of a feeling in which I find myself participate. For by this time I am beginning to defer to the matron myself, and am quite conscious that with her quick perception, and prompt energetic manner, she could take me in hand along with all the rest, and feel very little accession of responsibility. The first intimation I have of the present condition of the boys is, that "this is pudding day"—the day, that is to say, which is known at sea as "banyan," and it has been celebrated by the substitution of suet pudding and treacle for the ordinary meat, bread, and vegetables—much (as I am informed) to the satisfaction of the boys themselves, though as they give no confirmation of this remark, I do not consider the matter as definitely settled. Anyhow, they appear none the worse for their occasional abstinence, and are now making ready, briskly enough, to go out for the afternoon to play at cricket under the superintendence of the master himself, who seems to exercise a ready but familiar and gentle sway; the stick which he carries in his walks being, I have reason to know, used only as a general's baton for directing their movements, and not as

an instrument of punishment. I subsequently remark that some of the boys are in possession of halfpence—for I casually overhear a request to the master for permission to buy cherries—which, after a good-humoured remonstrance, is granted readily enough. I am, I confess, a little disappointed at the schoolroom, which is but roughly furnished with desks and forms, and is a long, narrow slip of a room on the basement floor, in a wing of the main building. It is less light and cheerful than I think all schoolrooms should be, and the boys are rather cramped for space. There is a good gravelled playground, however, were the atmosphere of corduroy is mitigated; and here I observe one or two bars for gymnastic exercises, and a pole with swinging-ropes. I am glad to learn too, that traps, bats, balls, and some other toys are amongst the recognised properties of the school, while in their own playground, apart from that of the boys, the girls are provided with skipping-ropes, and other means of healthy exercise and recreation.

The garden, which is laid out in pretty plots, has a division on each side, which both boys and girls are allowed to cultivate according to their fancy; and generally twice a week the children are taken out into the adjacent country, there to gambol about at their pleasure, with no more than a judicious restraint.

The boys receive instruction in English, or in that course which is familiarly known as reading, writing, and arithmetic, with a little geography and history, and, when they are old enough, are apprenticed to one of some half dozen trades according to their own choice. In fact, I remember noticing an announcement, fastened to the wall by the front gate, that one of them is now waiting to learn the art and mystery of the bakers' business.

In addition to their ordinary rudimental education, the girls are taught plain sewing, and some of them even acquire a knowledge of the higher classes of needlework, under the instruction of the more efficient of the sempstresses on the female side; they also help in washing, and in such household work as can be given them in the various wards, so that many of them have at least attained the orderly habits and personal cleanliness which belongs to a good servant, and require only further instruction under the direction of a kind and not too exacting housewife.

A great cloud of steam, and the clinking of pattens, indicate that I am approaching the laundry—a long out-building, almost open on one side, and furnished with sinks and troughs and coppers, which are fully sufficient to provide for the due cleanliness of all the apparel in the establishment.

Having, somehow, foolishly associated laundries with ruddy complexions, lawn-dried linen, and loud laughing-talk, I am a little disappointed at the appearance of the women who are engaged in this part of the building. To tell the truth, they are amongst the least attractive females it has ever been my fortune to become acquainted with; and what personal advantages they may possess are not heightened by the flat-bordered workhouse cap, the blue check uniform covered with a coarse apron, and bare arms, the elbows of which resemble knobs carved out of some hard, but easily discolorable, substance.

I may mention here, as part of my experience, that although amongst the regular paupers—inmates of workhouses—there are often pretty children, and very old women who still bear the traces of former beauty, the middle-aged and “elderly” females are, for the most part,

if not absolutely repulsive, at least by no means comely, either in form or feature. In many cases, hard and exigent labour, amidst the anxieties of a half-starved brood of children—in other instances, the ravages of disease and want, have told upon these inmates of the poor-house. But there is another reason for their appearance conveying an unpleasant impression to the casual visitor.

It cannot be denied (however irrational may seem the horror of those belonging to the poorer classes at the prospect of becoming recognised paupers) that many of the regular inmates of the workhouse, and especially the women, are characterised by that sort of degradation which produces an eager, grasping covetousness, and a constant dissatisfaction with the means taken for their relief. Under the look of half-audacious curiosity with which they regard the stranger who pays them a visit, there lies an expression which seems to ask in how much they will each be benefited by him. Many of them need only the opportunity to ask him in a whining voice for alms, and the probability of obtaining them would change their curiously bold and almost defiant manner into one of more offensive servility.

That much of this prevailing influence on the pauper mind may be the result of the present condition of the poor-law there can be little doubt. According to the very constitution of the means used for providing for the destitute, the suffering poor have a right to claim relief from the officers who are the paid servants and almoners of the public. These officers themselves have neither the right to refuse such relief nor the power to display any authority which would seem to arrogate to themselves the public beneficence. This is true in theory, but in practice it too frequently happens that the forms and tests used

are distorted into official persecutions of the poor who are compelled to become inmates of the Union, and that they produce at once a spirit of antagonism, all the more bitter because some of these people have themselves been taxpayers.

I see less of this feeling here than I have observed elsewhere, and I am certain, as far as my inquiries extend, that in this particular Union there is no reason for such a feeling existing; but all those who have had much to do with the labouring classes know how obstinately they hold to certain opinions, which are so generalised as to apply to entirely different branches of the same subject. These are my reflections as I look at the women, who, in return, look at me, from amidst a cloud of steam and a shower of foaming suds; but I am restored by the sight of the boys, who are by this time ready for the cricket-field, where they will be out of the way for two or three hours at least.

Again I refer to the provision of toys, and this open playground, with its covered shed for wet weather, as a piece of rational humanity which it would be well to make into a law; and, in referring to it, verify what I have believed long ago, that two or three times a year the boys and girls are taken to some mild and inexpensive amusement, one of which has been the visit to a celebrated equestrian circus, which is annually pitched in a field close by, and, in return, admits the children either free, or at a very great reduction in price. I picture to myself the breathless and eager wonder with which some of these chubby little men and women, bound in corduroy and blue check, follow the astounding evolutions of Mazeppa, or the enthusiastic delight with which they greet Signor Paillasse in his wonderful feats of horsemanship. Was there ever more genuine applause than that with which

they salute the old sawdust jokes of the ring clown, or the brilliant apparition of the sylphide who bounds through the paper tambourine?

Peeping into the little chapel, which stands aside between the main garden and the plots devoted to the children, and looks strangely like one of the little illuminated plaster of Paris edifices which Italian image men sell in poor neighbourhoods, I learn that the curates of two churches preach here alternately on Sundays to those amongst the paupers who are too infirm to go out. It is a neat, clean little place, as bright as a new pin, and made ornamental by a judicious and economical use of terra cotta and painted glass, but I seem to have come upon it as the last bit of ornament I shall be likely to meet with, for skirting it and crossing the area in which it stands, I pass through a gate, and so into the stone-yard. There are no paupers breaking stones at present, for it is the haymaking season, and there are ships in the docks, so that many of the able-bodied have found work, the two or three who are at work here being the idiots, who are mostly permanent inmates; one of them has just taken his spell at the pump, and fixes his lustreless prominent eyes upon me, as his head moves to and fro, as though he had a dim notion that I had come there expressly to see him on duty, and he was bound to keep up the credit of the establishment. He and his fellows, with two or three old, but not decrepid, men, are just now engaged in drawing this water, and in attending to the garden on the men's side, in which some, who *are* both old and decrepid, are sunning themselves on painted benches, and in one or two special cases smoking their pipes beneath the trees.

Adjoining the stone-yard—a bare, arid quadrangle with a white wall, and a glaring light gravel, and stone-chip

soil, is the casual ward—a shed-like building, leading by a gateway to a back lane, apart from the regular entrance to the house. Around this door on warm summer nights, and often on keen winter evenings, I have heard the tramps who have come from distant expeditions across the marsh, shouting or quarrelling, amidst the shrill voices of half-frozen, or utterly weary and dust-begrimed women, and the wailing of infants. To the credit of my work-house, I never heard of an urgent case of distress being unrelieved, or of any refusal to admit a perishing man, woman, or child, on the excuse of some trivial informality.

It is for this reason, and because I notice in this particular Union a determination to read the Poor-law in the spirit of righteousness and charity, rather than in the bare letter of sparse justice and cruel repression, that I take it to represent, as far as the present imperfect state of the law will allow, "Parochial Relief." For Parochial Relief and the Poor-laws are terms not to be confounded. They have often been made entirely antagonistic, and susceptible of a precisely contrary meaning. Coming from across the marsh country, or wandering in that direction from the pitiless London streets, the tramp who seeks the shelter of the casual ward, is admitted by this door in the back wall, at nine o'clock in the evening, and after having submitted to the necessary ordeal of a bath, which forms part of the arrangements of the outbuilding known as the casual ward, is supplied with a long and ample coarse cotton bedgown, a thick slice of bread, and a mug of water. The bedding upon the low iron bedsteads, in the small, bare, cleanly scrubbed room, is coarse, but clean, and it is usual here for the ordinary clothing of each temporary pauper to be removed, and only restored in the morning by the attendant in charge.

At a pretty early hour the "casual" is aroused, and receives another slab of bread by way of breakfast. It often happens, however, that neither breakfast nor supper is eaten, the needs of the tramps extending not so much to food as to rest. I am not disappointed in believing that this Union is conducted on the principle of *relieving* the poor, and it is on this account that broken-down women coming there with young children to seek a night's shelter, are often regarded with a larger charity than that which would limit them to the cold and repulsive fare of mere bread and water.

Such remnants of the day's supply of food, as a little warmed-up broth, sweetened gruel, or other savoury surplusage, will the kindly matron devote to those poor little famished stomachs, and as there are always to be found—even in a workhouse—stray garments, and the forgotten scraps of some former pauper's wardrobes, the half naked limbs of mother and children are not unfrequently clad in attire improvised from such cast-off drapery, already transformed by the needles of the younger inmates during their lessons in sewing.

With another glimpse of the stone-yard, lying silent and deserted, now that no able-bodied pauper has been admitted by order from the relieving officer for a week past, I conclude my inspection of the pretty garden, where flowers, vegetables, and gooseberry and currant bushes are in full bearing, under the cultivation of two or three old, but not inactive residents, who are still able to wield a spade, or plant out a border. Here I shake hands with the matron, who goes off to see to the children's tea, and am consigned to the master, fresh from weighing and checking stores. A quick-eyed, healthy-looking gentleman, I find him, with a kindly, clear voice—a "bright,"

highly-pitched voice, evidently meant to be heard by deaf ears. He reminds me, somehow, of a brisk first mate on board a bustling merchant vessel, registered A 1, at Lloyd's; and the fancy is still further increased by his wearing a straw hat, which he takes off presently, but puts on again in a moment, as though he had no time to lose. He is in no hurry with me, however, and he is neither too quick, too bustling, nor too loud, with these eight old men lying in bed, or sitting half dressed in the chairs which are set on the bedside mats in the infirmary ward. They are very old fellows indeed, some of them, their complaint being, as one of the number informs me, "old age, which there's no cure for, as he ever heard of, leastways the doctors haven't found it out yet." Some of them, however, are suffering from bad legs, and one from the remains of old-established rheumatism, which keeps him on his back for a great part of the year. They are a little merry as we go in—if such evidences as a broken laugh here and there, and several humorous but still half deprecatory grins can be called mirthful; for the master going up to a certain bed where a grizzled, but good-looking old face, shaded as to the head with a blue cotton handkerchief, is looking up at him rather wistfully, is listening to a remarkable statement respecting four hats, supposed to be the property of the old gentleman lying there, but now, and for some time past, missing, notwithstanding repeated inquiry.

To all the master's kind inquiries, this old fellow, propping himself up in bed, and with his shirt open at the throat, replies, that he himself is "tolerable well, but he can't hear nothing of them four hats, that his niece left there when she brought him—can't be found nowhere," and he "can't make out who's taken 'em away, since it's

nobody in that room, he's sure. It can't be that his niece took 'em back again, that's certain. Four hats were there? the master thought there were but three. "Yes, *four* hats—four; *four* of 'em, *and* a cap." Well, the master must ask his niece about it; with which assurance he is quite satisfied, and it is not till the door of the ward is shut behind us that I learn that the four hats, like Falstaff's men in buckram, will probably increase in number, and are but a harmless delusion, the confusion perhaps of some long-past incident with the latest event of his life by one who may have lost some of the threads of memory in the long skein of eighty-one years. Both on the male and on the female side the ordinary sleeping wards are rooms opening out of long corridors, some with two or three beds, some only with one; but all of them provided with well-constructed windows, and the means of complete ventilation. One of the most distressing conditions to which the life of the pauper family is subject is, undoubtedly, the separation of father, mother, and children, except for rare intervals during the time of their stay in the union, and it is this separation which is one of the things so much dreaded by the suffering poor; for it often happens, not amongst the poor only, but in all classes, that an apparently very imperfect perception of the claims of husband, wife, or children, in the ordinary actions of daily life, and in kindly, mutual forbearance, is altogether apart from the sentiment which regards separation either by death or any accidental arrangement as a great calamity. Those who have observed closely will ever be inclined to think that people who most constantly disregard their duties to others are more strongly, though less permanently, affected by disunion. At any rate, although it would be impossible to permit the ordinary family arrange-

ments to be continued in the workhouse, and for rate-payers to contribute to the support of a constantly increasing pauper population, some scheme might be devised for rendering the separation of parents and children less absolute. I am glad to find that some such arrangement is made in my present Union, and that several old couples have nearly as much of each other's society as is mutually agreeable. Speaking of the old people, it occurs to me that till I had some little acquaintance with the subject, I held (probably in common with many other folks) an illusion respecting these "oldest inhabitants," whose memories extend beyond the present "Poor Law" altogether. That I regarded them as ancient authorities, who could reveal from actual observation a great deal of that which to the present generation is but traditional; that, in short, the narratives of the workhouse, the reminiscences of the workhouse, and even the romance or sentiment of the workhouse, would be of deep and lasting interest if there were only the means of getting at them.

I cannot hold this opinion as the result of actual experience, however. The truth is, that I have known only two pauper gentlemen, and but one pauper scholar. With regard to those who have been gentlemen, there are few whose friends would suffer them to "come to the Union," and if there were any, they could scarcely bear with the administration of those workhouses to which they would be entitled to admission (I am speaking now of London), since the worst localities are near neighbours of the best; and the "Poor Laws" are too often acted upon in the full bitterness of "the letter which killeth."

The only pauper scholar of my acquaintance was a man whose attainments had been always unavailable. He was never much above the condition of a pauper, since being

born in a very humble sphere, and having attained what he knew by assiduous study, he was prevented by want of opportunity as well as by physical infirmity from making any pecuniarily advantageous use of his knowledge. His case was altogether exceptional, and although some scholars and men of intelligence may for a time become inmates of the Union, their sojourn is generally too short for them to settle down into regular pauperism. Is it the case, then, that the "four inmates whose united ages amount to"—so astonishing a number of years, cannot or will not recount those experiences which even without the aid of scholarship should be so interesting? At all events they do not. Ask any aged pauper a question relative to his experiences, say of the Gordon Riots, or of later events in which he took a more personal part; endeavour to draw him out into confidential revelations of his own private history, and you will discover, except in very rare cases, that his remarks are confined to some few vague and only half intelligible observations of little interest to anybody. The younger paupers seem scarcely better able to recount their experiences; not in either case that they are necessarily unwilling to impart them; their mumbling answers, such as they are, seem to be the result of unaccustomed effort. Reticence is a matter of habit, not one of choice, and the sum of the information they are likely to impart is included in their having "heerd tell," or having "known summat of what you speak of," but at the same time "never takin' no partiklar notice except what they heerd from other people, or as it was talked of at the time, having, in a manner of speakin', their own work, an' what not, to look arter." What their work was you may easily learn; and, indeed, these commonplace "annals of the poor" are so *very* common-place,

that even when the last vanity of age—that of believing that to be *very old*,—is in itself of sufficient interest to make all that belongs to such a condition interesting; the very oldest of the “four, whose united,” &c., will sometimes seem to express a humorous wonder that the inquirer should be as idle as he himself is compelled to be, and find no other occupation than to ask such questions. There are, of course, many exceptions to this, but I speak of ordinary pauperism: the women are often more voluble if they are young, more garrulous when they are old; but, with immeasurably less reticence, they are generally able to talk only of their little grievances, or of the concatenation of domestic troubles which brought them to the house, which no mortal foresight could ever have regarded as their ultimate destination.

I once knew a man who had been smuggler, convict, and general ruffian, and he entering, in his old age, a workhouse where there were some violent characters, became, by the sheer force of his former habits, and a fearless unflinching bravado, a sort of recognised chief or “cock” of this strange school, who administered a sort of rough justice; but this was in the early days of the Poor Law, before it had been so thoroughly reduced to a repressive system. It is, in fact, to this sort of repression which we may look, in part, for the unmeaning monotony which characterises the lives and manners of the pauper inmates. Even to each other the ancients who sit on the benches in the evening sun are very seldom communicative. Such conversation as they indulge in is gruff, monosyllabic, and concerns something which is of interest only within the workhouse walls—they speak little of the past, still less of the future. Not always, as I have said before, because they desire to be reticent, but because the

very system under which they live has about it something oblitative. There is but little individuality in its blank monotony :—a record of meals, with a few days on which they are at liberty to leave the bare blank walls of the wards,—the barer and blanker stones of the Union yard ; the quality of beef, and potatoes, and gruel ; the rarely prospective indulgence in snuff or tea. These things have taken the place of conversational reminiscences, or of the participation in any hope for the future, in which they do not form a part.

Even here, however, I am impressed with the fact, which has been more distinctly presented to me elsewhere, that there is a pauper population—not those who are the recipients of out-door relief, and to whom it would be well that a more complete recognition should be granted ; but those who might be almost termed professed paupers—people in whose families pauperism, that is to say, pauperism with short alternations of semi-starvation out of the workhouse, has become the ordinary condition. Their lives, out of the house, are supported by casual labour. The men often work at the docks, or at chair-mending, and deal in such small wares as can be sold from a huckster's barrow in poor neighbourhoods, or follow any chance calling for which they are strong enough. The women and children make lucifer-match boxes ; plait straw-matting ; make baskets. Many of them either work or cadge indifferently, live anyhow or nohow, and sometimes, but not very often, steal. Any of the elder girls getting a place, will rarely keep it for any length of time ; they know nothing, indeed, beyond the commonest scrubbing and plain washing ; but they love cheap and tawdry finery over their half-dirty ragged clothes, and are too often to be seen at street corners talking to “their young man,”

who is a shade less reputable even than themselves, and may be generally classed amongst those who are said in official returns to follow "no regular occupation." With the coals obtained from some local charity; the bread allowed them from the Union; the scanty help thus precariously obtained, and such waifs and strays of old garments as can be begged of the neighbours, these families keep out of the workhouse for a certain period in the year—keep out of it, it may be, till the mother is "over her confinement," by which time it will be strange if the elder daughter has not also contributed an additional inmate to the pauper nursery amongst those poor weird little foundlings crawling on the rug before the fire; stranger still if one or other of the boys has not "gone wrong." Others (some of them comparatively young women) have lost sight of their husbands, or with two or more children go out periodically for a month or two, come back at stated intervals to the workhouse, and accept pauperism as a convenient arrangement. Sometimes these women grow suddenly tired of restraint, and without even waiting for the regular method of departure, go out for a day or two "on the loose," and come back tired, half famished, or sometimes half drunk.

From this very place two of these regular paupers made a sudden departure over the high brick wall on the occasion of the Royal wedding, and, when "their spree was out," having by some means or other obtained food and drink and a few ordinary clothes, came back again resigned, but by no means repentant, to the accustomed restraint of the Poor Law routine.

There is no mistaking these regular paupers, men or women; the women, of course, are most numerous. Their looks of half-derisive impudence suddenly changed when

occasion demands to a hypocritical subserviency of manner—their almost ironical deference, which a moment may change into brazen threats or unexpected demands; above all, that sort of subdued devilry about them, which seems all the worse because they seem to glory in their capacity for keeping it in subjection—reminds me at a glance of the link which exists somewhere, and may be found here, between the pauper and the convict;—reminds me just as forcibly that, as in the prison there is too little distinction between the criminal of impulse and the deliberate scoundrel; so the Poor Law fails to discriminate between the unfortunate “poor,” who have themselves contributed to the relief which they have a right to claim; and the accustomed pauper to whom the workhouse dress and official harshness are neither sorrow nor disgrace.

The hardened ruffian who slyly chews the cud of patience for a ticket-of-leave in penal servitude is too well off when compared with the convict whose offence was sudden and unpremeditated, as his repentance is probably sincere. The broken men or women who seek parochial relief as a last resource, and only when they are ready to perish, are often fed with too niggardly a hand, and are made to feel too keenly the petty tyranny of paid officials, when undistinguished from their fellow inmates, to whom officials are but natural enemies, and pauperism a convenient refuge with the advantages of voluntary permanence.

There is something here which partially suggests these thoughts to me,—something which has had a good deal to do with suggesting other thoughts; and amongst them one that has advanced civilisation centuries, and changed the whole commercial and political aspect of the world:—need I say that I allude to a tea-kettle? Yes; there it is, singing its evening song on the embers of the fire in that

cosy little ward; singing to half a score of old women more or less feebly acknowledging my presence, at the large cleanly-scoured table where they are taking their tea. The kettle belongs to the matron, who lends it to this little company every day, with an addition, sometimes, to their small supply of tea, in order that they may enjoy the luxury of an extra spoonful or so "for the pot;" and to do them justice, they seem fully to appreciate the opportunity of making their own brew without reference to that of the ordinary house ration. I don't think that any of these belong to the paupers of whom I have just been speaking; and I am quite certain that the brisk old body who is just now sitting down to rest in the lower ward, where other more active tea-drinkers have been assembled, never belonged to that class. She is a slim, active woman, with a certain grace of figure still, and a remarkably well-cut face, with some of its youthful spirit unquenched, and its quick appreciation a little diminished by a slight deafness. I am inclined to think that she has been mending her shoe as we come in, for the quick eye of the master sees her slipping up the heel of one, and at once calls out to her in his cheery voice, to inquire what is the matter. She's not startled—not a bit; there is a quick—it may seem strange to say it, but I almost think there is a coquettish—glance in her composed face; a face so different from the dull lineaments of the party up-stairs, and so far apart from the impudent servility of some of the other women, that I see in it the evidences of good breeding, whatever may have been her former station.

"They're nearly worn out. I wish I could have a new pair," she says, slightly drawing aside her blue skirt, and displaying a foot and part of an ankle remarkably small

and well-shaped. "I must put on my new ones." The new ones make part of a small blue cotton bundle on a form by her side, from which it is evident that they have already been doing duty.

"Oh, I dare say," says the cheery master, laughingly; "we must see how long these have lasted, and then perhaps I may look out a pair for you—a nice light pair. Are these the shoes you had at Christmas, when you and I opened the ball and danced together?"

"Aye, that they are, the very same," replies the bright old lady, growing still brighter; "but I don't think they'll last till the next ball, unless I have a new pair to wear for every day."

I am at first inclined to regard this conversation as a mutually understood fiction—a mere pleasant conceit; but it is good hard reality; not Poor Law reality, but the better truth which belongs to the genuine relief of the poor. There really is a Christmas jollification here amongst the paupers. A pauper feast, a pauper merry-making over harmlessly enlivening drink and meat, a pauper ball, in which the master and the matron too (when she is not bustling hither and thither, to set the children to games for nuts and oranges, and plain Christmas cake) take a genial part. Of all this great family party none is more blithe and genial, I warrant him, than the quick, active governor of so many diverse charges, as he leads this bright old creature—one of the seniors of the house—down the long ward, to the merry music of an amateur workhouse band, improvised for the occasion easily enough, where there is sure to be somebody with a turn for playing on some sort of instrument.

Was I thinking that there should be some arrangement for discriminating between the different classes of paupers,

some recognition of the "decayed gentlewoman," for instance? Well, such an arrangement is far from impossible. Will I be good enough to wait here in this lobby on an upper floor, while the master knocks at the door before me? It is opened presently by an old woman, in a very clean copy of the Union dress; and as we are invited to enter, my companion removes his hat and goes in briskly, but, as I think, with a slightly abated footstep, and I follow him.

Five elderly ladies, of whom three are sitting in chintz-cushioned, old-fashioned, arm-chairs beside their beds, and two are reclining on the beds themselves, which have been turned into temporary couches by the introduction of large counterpanes. Of these old gentlewomen (for such has been their former condition), she who reclines nearest the door seems to be the mistress of the ceremonies, for she invites me to be seated, and at once commences a sprightly conversation with the master, who inquires very solicitously respecting the health of each, and learning that some have been able to walk in the garden, jocularly surmises that they may soon be leaving him altogether.

I notice that on the sills of the open windows a goodly array of bright flowers in pots makes the ward cheerful, and that its inmates are not subjected to the ordinary workhouse dress, but are quite independent, especially in the matter of caps, some of which are smart enough, while the old lady who first did the honours of the place is attired in an old-fashioned black silk gown, above which a snowy kerchief sets off to no little advantage her bright cheerful eyes and good-humoured face.

To attend on these old ladies—who would in any case require attendance, since they are all of them feeble—there are, I see, two respectable-looking women (themselves

long past middle age), who have occupied the position of domestic servants before their admission to the house. My visit is a pleasant, but still a slightly ceremonious call, and at its termination, after a little chat about the flowers, the weather, and such similar subjects as can most readily be found, we make our bows, and are once more ushered to the door by one of those neat attendants.

Once in the gravelled yard adjoining the garden, I become conscious of a bevy of strange beings—the idiot girls and women who are now lingering about without any apparent object, except it be to see the master at his usual time of visiting the wards on their side. There are one or two quite old women amongst them, and one young woman with a strange, bold, demonstrative manner common to the half-witted, and evidently affording a good deal of amusement to those who are cunning enough to notice that there is some peculiarity about her which is not common to the rest. She presses forward now, and stretches out her hand persistently till the master takes it in his own.

“She’s been a wantin’ to shake hands with you all the arternoon, master,” says a woman with a blurred, epileptic face and cunning eyes.

“Well,” retorts the other, with a grim laugh, “it ain’t often as we gets a good hand to shake, it ain’t.”

At this sally all the rest grin, except one or two, who seem to mope apart, with little interest in anything. One of these, a girl of about thirteen, brings her wild melancholy face nearer, and, with a scared look, takes hold of my companion with both hands.

“She wants to go home to her mother,” she says, in a scared piteous sort of way. God help her; it would, to

my human thinking, be well if in His mercy He would take her home this very day.

Some sort of relief from that inevitable monotony which is the condition of Union life in general, is provided by a sort of reading or club-room, where the men are permitted to sit at certain times to read such newspapers and magazines as can be procured for their entertainment.

Passing through this room, a light clean place, with well-scrubbed seats and tables, and abutting on the quietest part of the garden, I notice that here, as everywhere, our old friend, the 'Illustrated London News,' is a welcome visitor, providing as it does gay and attractive pictures for the bare lime-whitened walls, and a fund of amusement to the old fellows, who are fond of good print and suggestive illustrations. Just now there is nobody present but the old gentleman who has the care of the place; for the last meal is about to be served in some of the wards, and many of the little ones are already being prepared for bed.

These little ones have had their tea an hour ago, their tea being much the same as breakfast, and consisting of four ounces of bread and butter and a mug of milk, for which a half pint of broth is substituted on one day in the week. Their dinners are composed, on three days, of three ounces of cooked meat and six ounces of vegetables, and on the four other days are made up of four ounces of bread and half a pint of soup, or of half a pound of rice or other pudding. This is for children of from two to five years old. Those whose ages are from five to nine years have an increase in quantity, except in the matter of bread; that is to say, half a pint, instead of a quarter of a pint of milk, four ounces of meat, eight ounces of vegetables, and three quarters of a pint of soup.

The able-bodied men receive for breakfast six ounces of bread and a pint and a half of gruel; for dinner, five ounces of cooked meat, and twelve ounces of vegetables; and for supper, six ounces of bread and a pint of broth. This is for three days in the week, but on two days the dinner consists of six ounces of bread and a pint and a half of soup, and on the two remaining days fourteen ounces of suet pudding; but on these occasions they receive half an ounce of butter with their bread, and some gruel for supper. The able-bodied women receive an ounce less of bread, and half a pint less of gruel, than the men. The children who are of that "growing age," between nine and sixteen, have the same rations as the women, with the addition of half a pint of milk and water morning and evening. Every infirm pauper over sixty years of age may have a pint of cocoa or tea, and half an ounce of butter every morning and evening, instead of the gruel, which so many of them dislike. To prepare all the food consumed, a large kitchen is generally in a bustle during all the former part of each day; and the reception of the stores, including clothing, shoes, medicines, and other necessaries, is a very onerous part of the master's duty. Here, at all events, every pauper can demand to see his rations weighed; and some new comers exercise this privilege with a morose disbelief in the probability of their obtaining their just due,—a disbelief for which their previous experiences may perhaps have given some grounds.

It cannot be doubted that the particulars to which I have just referred offer few attractions to those who come into the Union as a refuge from the responsibilities of self-support; but, as I take my leave, I am impressed with a conviction that the old, the sick, and the suffering are

here regarded with wider and more generous charity than that represented in the dietary tables, and that no very great horror would be depicted on the good-humoured faces of master or matron, should some unusually hungry Oliver Twist venture to "ask for more."

IV.

A LONDON WORKHOUSE.

WHAT is the worst neighbourhood of London? Various parts of the metropolis have been in turns so distinguished; but the question is one not easily answered, since there are half a dozen localities, each of which is so like another, that even an intimate acquaintance would be insufficient for the purpose of distinguishing degrees of insalubrity or moral depravity. Notwithstanding the demolition of a great part of the district of which Field Lane was the representative centre, and the consequent dispersion of many such gangs as that over which the Jew Fagin presided during the period when his history was written, there are few worse neighbourhoods than that foul tangle of streets and blind alleys which lie between the waste ground in Victoria Street and the commencement of New Oxford Street. The stamp of low knavery remains yet upon the open space in the first of these thoroughfares, where the Underground Railway has made confusion worse confounded, and the bare houses and dirty half-broken windows stare, like suddenly discovered evil-doers, on the crowd of betting men and boys who congregate upon "the ruins" just before a race, and—their old station by Bride Passage being forbidden—whisper mysteriously over greasy little memorandum-books, or wait the coming of the great men who some-

times condescend to pay the place a visit on their way to "the Corner."

Detachments of the same crowd may be seen any day during the season slouching about the sporting taverns in Fleet Street; or, when they have anything to spend, invading the bar with a half-defiant, and yet deprecating hang-dog air, as though they were subject to summary ejection; they may be jostled against as they crowd up to the windows of the offices where sporting newspapers display the latest telegrams of the race, and they watch and follow the two or three well-known betting men who have large stakes on the event, in the hope of learning an opinion, or putting a "half sov." on a horse with somebody with whom to bet at all, will in some way establish their broken credit among outsiders less fortunate than themselves. It is a motley crowd: seedy, buttoned-up, greasy, napless, flushed, beshawled, hard-hatted; plain mechanic-looking; flashy, butchery, bakery, cornchandlery, and knavish, but never jovial; always depressed, dingy, secret, and—even when it has a boisterous appearance—seldom given to waste words, and relapsing into a stealthy suspicious manner, which, added to its air of having slept anywhere than in a bed, or of not having slept at all, makes it one of the most repulsive crowds ever seen in London streets.

The farther boundary of the district may be said to terminate with the once notorious parish of St. Giles, of which it is sometimes supposed that "recent improvements" have made one of those "clean sweeps" so often mentioned, but so seldom realised, in relation to London slums. Not that the process generally understood by a clean sweep would in reality represent an unmitigated good; for as the criminals inhabiting these districts must

be swept elsewhere, and the localities to which they emigrate may not be always easy of discovery, even if they are not in a situation more injurious to the honest public; it may sometimes be worth while to consider whether a notorious haunt where evil-doers may be looked for with a tolerable certainty of being found when wanted, is not in some sense an advantage. If any one who believes that St. Giles's is a thing of the past, however, will take a walk down Endell Street, and towards Mudie's library, he will have an opportunity of inspecting a very full-blown specimen, indeed, of that palmy neighbourhood, in a street which—having somehow stood out of the mechanical line of the reformatory broom—abuts on the main thoroughfare, and seems, so far from desiring to succumb to the new order of things, as to glory in its squalid wretchedness, and to flaunt its beggars' rags in the face of gentility and the new baths and wash-houses, whose florid brick architecture offers no impediment to as foul a row of tenements as ever disgraced civilisation.

The same loose and broken pavement, the same blackened casements stuffed with dirty rags and old newspapers, the same yellow half-washed tatters fluttering on lines carried across the street from upper windows, the same crumbling walls and foul, dark, broken staircase, the same dilapidated rooms and cellars, bare of furniture, but crowded with lodgers, who sleep on any substitutes for beds; the same drunken women and listless unoccupied men, the same sallow rickety children sprawling in the dirt at the doorways or going on stealthy errands, the same scowling eyes to watch the stranger who ventures there after dark, the same want and misery, and probably the same crime, may be found here now as when the turning was one of many which lay in the midst of a

neighbourhood long a terror to the metropolis, and generally not to be traversed in safety even by broad daylight. The whole aspect of the place is so little changed that it might seem to have been left by "the authorities" as an example of thief-London, to prove how "the dangerous classes" have taken to themselves the condition of the poor, in so far that they are always with us.

It is between these two places, however, that the neighbourhood to which I am bound is to be discovered; the crowded alleys, and courts, and "rents" huddled together about Leather Lane, and Hatton Wall, and Baldwin's Gardens, to the great thoroughfare of Holborn and Gray's Inn Road. Dirty stone tanks of places, with ruinous houses for the walls; narrow *culs de sac*, with entrances like the gateways of ruined stables; ancient hostelries, tottering to decay, in recesses difficult to find, and with some of the scores of lodgers who have taken possession of the dingy rooms, looking drearily over the old heavy wooden balconies, upon the space which was once the terminus for fast coaches, but has long ceased to suggest anything but costermongers' litter, or to remind the inmates of anything more locomotive than a parish funeral. Small dingy public-houses in back streets, where Italian organ-grinders hold their revels, and dance lugubriously to the playing of one of their own instruments, the owner of which is elevated on a deal table; flaring gin-shops, where knots of Irish labourers slouch in and out, and go back again to their hovels, or stand there smoking and jangling with women, with bundle handkerchiefs for head-dresses,—until a fight calls for a spirituous pacification, and a visit to another flaring gin-shop six doors further on.

Groups of foreign workmen, in green tunics, blue blouses, concertina-shaped caps,—the carvers and gilders or the

modellers of the plaster figures at the image shops, where the grimy cupids swing disconsolately from the ceilings in a dim twilight till the gas is lighted, when they vibrate like monstrous moths intent on self-destruction. In the main thoroughfare of Leather Lane, brisk butchers' shops, doing a great trade in poor joints, and that peculiar artificial arrangement of bone and meat known as "block-ornaments;" hucksters' barrows of tin-ware toys; green-grocery, common delf, cured and salted fish, damaged fruit, and cheap haberdashery. The quiet church of St. Alban the Martyr, lying just off from the noise and bustle, preparing for evening service as the vergers light the lamps, and the gleam falls upon the painting in fresco over the altar, and shines upwards to the high pointed arches, with their pure pale ornaments of terra cotta, while the organ gives out the first notes of the voluntary, and seems so far apart from all the surging squalid crowd which shouts and quarrels in the neighbouring streets. The librarian and superintendent of the Ragged School,—held in the house that was once the Thieves' Kitchen, but now filled up-stairs and down with children,—perspiring in their nightly work of dividing a hundred scholars into classes amongst half a dozen teachers, and distributing the books which they are allowed to take home with them to read. Behind and beyond all this, the external aspect of the streets, common lodging-houses, thieves' haunts, low brothels, and the dead silence which betokens the dreary abodes of misery and crime, make up that "worst neighbourhood" of a particular phase of which I am in search to-day. A blank wooden gate squeezed into a small space in the midst of the neighbouring shops, and indicated by a board, on which are painted the regulations for granting medical assistance, and the times at which

the applicants for parochial relief will be received by the "Master," is, as I am informed, the entrance to one of the most constantly occupied, although by no means the largest of the London workhouses, where a large proportion of the inmates come and go so frequently that they might, in some other districts, be almost regarded as "casuals," and receive no definite settlement in the regular wards. The blank gate being opened by an old pauper, with a slightly disconsolate look which might be supposed to belong to, sitting on duty all day in, a paved yard, I am admitted, and make my way to a flight of stone steps leading to the hall or lobby, where another old man sits at a low desk, contemplating, with a similarly subdued expression, a very large ledger, on which he seems to be employed making entries whenever he can bring his mind to the task. The office in which I am directed to wait for "the master" is a small room, with a business-like air about it, and a great iron safe let into the wall near the desk, on the probable contents of which I find myself speculating so persistently, that I take a turn into the hall again, towards a large apartment round a corner, where some three hundred paupers, old men, women, and children, are at dinner.

The place, which is, like the school-room, attached to a church, is furnished with forms and desk-like tables, placed in different directions, and in separate groups, for the children and adults of both sexes; and at a cross-table under a high desk like a pulpit, the master himself—without a coat, and with his throat released from both collar and neckerchief—is carving the meat, and weighing out the allowance for each person according to the dietary scale, which differs but slightly from that of the union where I lately made the acquaintance of the pauper of the

north-eastern suburb. A workhouse dinner is soon dispatched, since nobody is expected to "go in twice," and "particular cuts" are altogether unknown. A few of those who sit munching at the tables look satisfied, but the prevailing expression amongst these, as with most other paupers, is a dull, half-apathetic, mechanical motion of the jaws, which continues even while they are watching with open eyes anything that may happen to attract their attention, and particularly a visitor, to whom they seem desirous of conveying an impression of subdued discontent, as though they should say, "Yes, you may look, but we are bound to endure it; don't you see how we're put upon, and what a dull prison-house this is?"

And so it is. Seen in the bare wards, where the long rows of low bedsteads, each covered with the same pattern of counterpane, make even the dull walls more monotonous; in the cleanly scrubbed floors; the absence of any furniture save that which is required for the absolute necessities of the place; the high-walled yards; the gray and blue dresses, unrelieved by any variety of make or pattern—this dreary monotony, which would make a solitude of the most crowded place under heaven, is the most repellent fact of workhouse life. The effect of this is less observable in the boys, who are now coming out in single file, and dressed (sensibly enough this warm weather) in holland-pinafores over their corduroy trousers. Some of them are still masticating the last of the most tasty mouthful reserved as the finish of their mid-day meal; and, as they pass, bear a general resemblance to the other inmates, inasmuch as they stare at me, while they ruminate like so many young cows. They walk on briskly enough, however, and with an alert expression in their faces which assures me that half holidays are not

unknown even in workhouses, and that this (being Saturday) is one of them. There are amongst both boys and girls many sickly, deformed, and stunted children who will, perhaps, carry with them to the grave these heritages of the gutter and the foul lodging-house where they struggled, like unhealthy plants, into such life as they possess ; but in almost all of them I am rejoiced to see something of that elastic spirit which shows that here, too, the old suppression of every hope and promise of youth has been superseded by a gentler and more beneficent appreciation of the difference between poverty and crime. I wish that the same could be said of other places where "the Poor Law" is wrested to a harsher punishment than that of the criminal code, and where the grim rule and oppressive dead level of the workhouse ward is but a preparation of the youthful pauper for the no more repulsive discipline of the gaol.

I remember, however, that this as well as many other of the arrangements for good or evil lie with a heavy weight of responsibility upon "the master," who may be a fawning ruffian, truckling to the Board of Guardians, and boastfully anxious to "keep down the rate" and the paupers at the same time ; or who may, and, thank God, often is, a man of experience, willing to contrive inexpensive comforts which he recognises as absolute necessities in such a condition, and with all judicious respect, determine to regard the inmates of "the house" as a charge for whom he is responsible, not to the Board of Guardians alone, but to his own conscience and to the ratepayers, whose money may be put to a better interest than that of reducing God's image, however defaced, to that of the most savage amongst the brute creation.

The master is in a great heat from the exertion of

carving and weighing, although he is a tall muscular gentleman, with somewhat of a military bearing, and (notwithstanding his open collar) a way of holding his head, as though he had at one time looked at the world over a stiff leather stock. This, with his firm step, full deep voice, and a certain blunt courtesy, impress me with a conviction that he is not, by any means, the wrong man in the wrong place, and I am not surprised that he should be ready to show me "the house," as he is about to make his own daily visit to the different wards after resuming his neckerchief, and a particularly fresh-looking linen coat. It is cleaning-day, or at least, a special cleaning day; for every morning (I am informed) the wards of this great straggling building are scrubbed and purified, or in that close neighbourhood, and with the inmates who come and go there, the place would soon be unendurable. It is clean and fresh enough now, however, for the painters and whitewashers have been at work, and the walls against which the long rows of bedsteads stand have been coloured a pale blue, as an improvement on the sickly yellowish tint which is peculiar to such apartments. I notice, too, that, in the sick wards, a number of very good engravings, mostly on religious subjects, have been framed and hung in the spaces between the beds. These serve to break the bare surface of the long cold wall, and must be no slight addition to the few beguilements of the hours which pass so heavily to the feeble creatures who lie here until they die, or gain sufficient strength to crawl into the sunnier parts of the square stone yards. There are many occupants of these wards to whom even such poor relief will never come; and as the wards, whether for the sick or the rest of the paupers, are all in one set pattern, the only variety witnessed by the visitor,

except the difference between tenanted and untenanted beds, is that of the thin withered anxious faces which peer upwards from the white pillows, or rest in a slumber so like death,—that death itself, which is here too, makes but little change. In each of the old men's wards there are the same figures curled round upon their sides beneath the bedclothes, striving to sleep away the long hours which are yet so few, when measured to the quickly approaching end; the same wistful pinched looks; the same watchful eyes, following the master as he walks down the room, or stops to speak to one here and there, or to consult with the nurse; the same silent, patient depression visible amongst the few who are able to get up, and are now sitting in the chairs by the guarded fire, or by the bed sides. One or two reading, others looking down listlessly at the little squares of carpet on which their feet rest, others still seeming to wonder within themselves by what preternatural accession of energy they got up, and to be ready for bed again whenever it shall occur to anybody to put them there. Two or three with closed eyes, and thin quiet hands resting outside the bedclothes, appear to be unconsciously floating down the great river which ebbs so slowly, and yet so rapidly towards the sea; one with a strange screwed-up dark wrinkled face, who is, perhaps, nearer to the sea than any of the rest, but whose bright black eyes look out with painful inquiry, like those of a wounded animal, and seem to ask whether the disease of which he is dying is really incurable. In the old women's wards there is, at the same time, more vigour and more complete debility; by the fire an ancient dame of more than eighty sits in pauper state, and with that contented pleasant expression of face which surely is in some measure to be referred to the physical health

which could have sustained unbroken such a weight of years. Her senses are so acute, that she hears and stoops to caress the little dog which has followed us into the room. She has nothing to complain of except that she can't get about much—a complaint for which the master rates her in a jocular and kindly manner. Her age, I fancy, gives her some privilege, for I observe that her dress differs a little from the regular workhouse uniform, though whether it is in the shape and make of the cap, or in the general costume, I am unable to determine.

A more painful subject soon engrosses the attention both of nurse and master, however; for there are bed-ridden women here, who are suffering from painful disease, from ulcers and other maladies inseparable, perhaps, from such a place and among such people. One patient is now sitting up in bed while her neck is being dressed, and another able-bodied looking woman is standing in the middle of the room, with her foot upon a chair, that she may be questioned as to a badly disordered leg. There is something remarkable about this patient's face, for although it is an ordinary countenance as far as any approach to beauty is concerned, there is a quiet determination, and a deprecatory self-possession in its lineaments, which mitigate my surprise at hearing that she is in some sort a martyr to a principle.

“Does she have her beer or her wine?” asks the master.

“Well, to tell you the truth, sir,” answers the rather kindly looking dame, who officiates as nurse, “she won't take it, because she took the pledge about six months ago, and she won't break it; and more than that, she would go about scrubbing, and that when there was no call for it, and I told her not to do it.” The master

takes her to task pretty smartly for her folly, pointing out that, because she takes these things by a doctor's orders, there is no need why she should go out of the workhouse and get drunk ; but she only shakes her head.

I venture to inquire whether she is a Roman Catholic, at which she looks a little confused, but says no, she isn't ; isn't anything that she knows of, and isn't good enough for *them* ; but when I follow up this inquiry, by representing to her that she would scarcely have hesitated to take even wine or spirits if she had had it put in a medicine bottle by a chemist from a doctor's prescription, and that to take what is ordered is no breach of her pledge, she shakes her head in a still more determined manner, as though she would cast away such sophistry, and responding that a vow was a vow, and she won't break her pledge, takes her foot off the chair, and turns away. In the long ward, where this colloquy has been going on, lie several aged women, either asleep, or so still and breathless, that for a moment I think some of them are dead, especially as their faces are covered with pieces of blue gauze to keep off the flies, which buzz in at the open windows from the foul haunts close by. Most of the poor old creatures are too weak to lift their hand to drive away these troublesome visitors, and many of them, whether they are asleep or not, lie with closed eyes. One at least is near the last sleep of all, and as I stand and regard that withered brown face, over which the great and unmistakable change is stealing, the old woman who sits by the bedside to keep the flies away, and to watch the slow coming and going of the feeble breath, sees sympathy, I hope, in my looks, and without speaking, makes a sudden sorrowful gesture with her hands, and forms the words " she's dying " with her lips.

It seems strange that there should be so little of

the hush and solemnity with which we ordinarily associate such a scene, but what is to be done, where every square yard of room may be required at a few hours' notice, and anything like the quiet repose of home is impossible, either for the living or the dying. That there is seldom too much space, I discover by a visit to the older portion of the building, or the original poor-house of the parish, where, in a ward on the lower floor, and immediately adjoining a yard, there are more beds and more inmates, although none of them are sick or bedridden. In the yards I see no paupers who could be properly described as able-bodied, and though, ordinarily, there are some few young women picking oakum in a part of the basement devoted to that purpose, there are none to-day. The able-bodied and the casual paupers receive little encouragement in this particular Union, and I am disposed to believe that, although the new regulations with regard to the reception of the casual poor will make no material difference in the treatment at this casual ward, the able-bodied make but a short stay within the walls. Down in the principal yards the women are passing about with pails, while some of the elders sit in a row on a form under the shade of the laundry; both youths and women join in the cleansing process which is going on in the various wards, and some of the old men are engaged in such domestic duties as must necessarily be performed regularly for the proper ordering of so large a family. In the warmest corner of the yard, too, a whole row of female idiots, of various ages, sit blinking and lounging, as it seems to me, with a vague consciousness of superiority in the fact of nothing being at the moment expected of them. The same stout, beef-faced young woman who is the peculiar representative, I fancy, of all pauper idiocy, offers her hand as we pass, and

asks after our health in the same thick utterance as though she spoke during sleep, and while suffering from greatly enlarged tonsils. In the infirmaries there are the same rows of beds, many of them occupied by those whose sickness is of a terrible and probably a fatal character ; but I am glad to see that these at least are apart from the main body of the house, and removed from the noise and traffic of the ordinary wards. This is the case also with respect to the ward for lying-in women, of whom there is at present only one ; so that the nurse, a very intelligent woman, going about amongst the beds, seems quite solitary, although she has evidently little leisure in a general way, as her overworked looks and pale, anxious face will testify.

The last little addition to the workhouse population is asleep in a cot, in a smaller room adjoining the lying-in ward, where four other infants are lying. The room itself is entirely bare of furniture, and my thoughts are directed instinctively to the nursery in the Union, visited a few days ago, where I made the acquaintance of several children, and notably of one little blue-eyed maid.

Another small room, where there are four cots, under the superintendence of an Irish nurse with that round pink face, blue-gray eye, and eagerly listening expression which is so commonly seen amongst the women of the "Imrald Oile." The room, which is as bare as the rest, opens on to a landing, and men employed in the repairs of the place are passing in and out, so that I walk in carelessly but quietly, not wishing to disturb the mid-day sleep of the little inmates. I walk in quietly, but stop midway with a sudden shock, seeing that I have come thoughtlessly and unannounced into the presence of death. One of the poor little creatures, a child of some five years

old—still dressed in the union clothes—is lying just before me, stretched out on the mattress from one of the cots, placed upon two chairs.

“Was runnin’ about after he’d had his dinner, and went down quite sudden, all in a minute,” says the nurse. “Has had his wine—oh, yes, every day, and seemed to be better; the men was noticin’ that he was quite lively to what he had been.”

The poor little, thin, yellow face, its lineaments settling grimly even in that last sleep which with childhood is mostly soft and beautiful, has an Irish look in it, too; but born in disease and crime, and nursed in a stifled room and foul air, it is so strangely old and worn, that I scarcely wonder to see the arm so thin, and to hear that it is “consumption.” “It’s a good thing that the poor little creature is dead,” says the master, as he lifts the dead child’s arm, and looks solemnly into the little face, his own bearded chin bent down upon his broad chest; “he has a sister in the house, and she is scarcely likely to live; both were born consumptive.”

The parents of these children belonged to a gang of coiners, whose depredations had called forth the utmost vigilance of the police; and the mother had been, if not murdered by the father, at least subjected to a fatal negligence which bore the suspicion of murder. Both were confirmed drunkards, and one night when the terrible craving for more liquor just sufficed to rouse the besotted woman to appeal for another glass of gin, her husband helped her plentifully from the bottle—not the gin-bottle, but that containing the powerful acid used in their nefarious business. He was acquitted of the charge of murder, to die soon afterwards of the effects which adulterated gin brings about more slowly, but seldom less surely, than

unadulterated poisons. The other coiners have dispersed, or have been committed to penal servitude; while one living and one dead child are at this moment amongst the half-forgotten memoranda belonging to the case that, for just twenty-four hours, gained a newspaper notoriety under the title of "Horrible Death of a Woman from drinking *Aquafortis*." Of the living children in the room three are asleep, and chubby, healthy rogues they look—a fact about which the nurse is, to my mind, a little too demonstrative; as who should say, "No underfeeding there, and no want of attention on my part; don't think it." An impression which seems to me the more unpleasant, since her manner appears, under the circumstances, not only disparaging to the dead child, but to another rather pale, pretty, anxious-eyed little creature, who is awake and whining in its cot, looking about it, as I cannot help thinking, with an uneasy sense of some strange presence in the room—the presence it may be of death, which to the organism of a delicate and nervous child, may be as apparent as are some other things which are lost on our coarser or more hardened sensibilities.

The nurse endeavours to check the poor infant's cry with a subdued remonstrance and a warning finger, but neither that, nor the few words I say to it, will stay the uneasy look and the shifting of the head from side to side, as though in the endeavour to see what had troubled its short sleep with a terror which overbore all smaller fears.

There is something strange, even to me, in that little rigid body, and the face now settling so grimly, the overhanging brow and large lower jaw showing even in infancy the type from which it came, as surely as the pewter coin amongst which the child was born bore the impress of the die that stamped them.

Meanwhile, the master has walked to the window, where he looks out upon the yard, for he has not forgotten the feelings which such a sight will produce, and has too much delicacy to watch their effect. He does not pretend that they so affect himself, and such a pretence would be unworthy of his frank bearing—such scenes are the familiar circumstances of his daily life, and he becomes hardened to their exterior influences. Not hardened at heart, though, thank God! for, leaving the dead child behind, we enter another ward where three children, somewhat older, are running about amidst the bedsteads; and the first of the three who catches sight of that well-known tall figure makes madly at his legs, and clasps them with an energy which no child under heaven could simulate. The other two are not slow to follow, and as one little fellow lifts up his tiny face for the customary pat upon the cheek, I see emotion in the bearded face that looks down upon it. They are suffering from ophthalmia—these three; and for that reason are confined to the long airy ward, instead of being sent out to play with the other children. One peculiarity of this Union is, that the ordinary workhouse gruel, known to the paupers as “skilley,” has been superseded by rice, since it was found that the oatmeal was not only distasteful to the majority of the inmates, but aggravated the skin diseases to which they were specially liable, and kept the “foul ward” in requisition.

To the children the substitution of rice must be desirable enough, but even a long course of rice becomes insipid to the British palate; and I am glad to hear the nurse plead for cocoa for breakfast on behalf of these three little ones, and to learn that cocoa may be obtained by application in the kitchen or to the matron.

The sound of shrill voices stops me for a moment at a

staircase window, as we go down to see "the garden;" and looking out, I discover that two of the yards are converted into playgrounds for boys and girls, and that the voices proceed from some half-dozen of the latter, who are whirling merrily enough round a gymnastic pole provided with a wheel at the top, to which ropes are attached. There are also horizontal bars, and other apparatus in the same enclosure; and in the adjoining yard I see a shuttlecock flying, and hear the sound of smaller voices in all the enjoyment of the playhour.

There are strange extremes in this great building where about 400 inmates live at the moment, and so many may be dead by this time next week; and where 127 of those recently received are only known as "vagrants." Strange extremes; but it is well that I should depart with a pleasant impression, and if anything could be pleasant in the external arrangements of such a place, it would surely be this garden, even apart from the consideration of the strong love of nature which could overcome the difficulties in the way of making a green and fresh oasis within this walled desert of brick and stone over which the hot simoom, from a foul labyrinth of fever-haunted streets and alleys, blows night and day. Yes in this square enclosure the walls are nearly hidden by creeping plants; shrubs and flowers lie in pretty plots, and embower the fountain, which, with its ornaments of bright stones and tinted shells, plashes coolly in the centre; along one side a large wire-fronted aviary is filled with pigeons of various breeds and plumage; and ferns are growing in pots and under cases in the shadiest corners. It is like a transformation scene from the bare walls and long wards, and I am glad to know that the paupers, and especially the pauper boys, are permitted sometimes to come here; the

latter having, indeed, helped to form the garden, and still helping to keep the leaves fresh by constant care. Yes, it is like a transformation scene; and I notice that in that outbuilding the doorway has been subject to the scene-painter's art, in the shape of an illusory green wicket-gate upon a back-ground of neutral tint. "May I ask where that door leads to?"—"That! Oh, to the dead-house."

Yes, to the last scene of all visible to mortal eyes; nay, to the green baize curtain of the drama of life, when the real great transformation has been effected, and the rags and properties of the stage may be estimated at their proper worth. As I go slowly out at the door in this workhouse courtyard, I am possessed by a strange fancy—That child, whose little body is lying there waiting for the pauper funeral;—that old, old woman, who will so soon be an inmate of the same place.—In the great transformation what will be the change for each? Blighted youth and worn-out age, meeting in the dead-house as to the body—meeting under what conditions *there*; or, if meeting, influenced by what affinities in relation to this London Union? Has it ever entered into the hearts of people living (as they hope) Christian lives, that there is a duty to be done in visiting the poor even after the law takes cognizance of them? That, without interference, or even without immediate comment, ladies and gentlemen having much time hanging wearily upon their hands might be profitably employed in looking round their own parish with a real human interest, which is truer than that in the last piquant horror of the newest novel? That even with the best intentions and the most unflinching integrity, the master of a workhouse has more upon his hauds than can leave him leisure to enter into all

those details which often make the difference between comfort and discomfort to the old or suffering pauper; that while he is paramount in the ward, he is to a certain extent subservient in the board room, and dependent upon the guardians for the means of carrying out such good intentions as he may have formed? That the occasional quiet observation of parishioners would, if properly managed, virtually exercise a control over both guardians and officers, and that by these means, just as the probable abuses of centralisation are checked by local self-government, so the more obvious negligencies and abuses of local boards and small officials would be prevented by that individual interest which will not be content to leave all morality, love, and charity, to an organised system, which finds a mechanical representation in the *Poor Law*? I am roused from these meditations by a great crowd in one of the alleys, but a few paces from the workhouse gate. So great a crowd, that with some experience of the teeming houses in the neighbourhood, I am puzzled to know how the wretched tenements in this one spot could contain all the people who are thronging about the doors, or swelling a mob at the end of the street.

It is a very ordinary event that has called them together. A purse snatched from a woman's hand by a girl of thirteen or fourteen, who has made her escape by some back way through a house, and is, by this time, far enough from the two policemen who look hot but sternly dissatisfied after a futile endeavour to lay hold of the culprit. It is so commonplace an event, that the crowd slowly sinks back again into the doorways, or trickles off by the main thoroughfare, and a fiddle in an adjoining beershop is heard to resume the favorite air of "Come back Peter."

V.

LAND RATS AND WATER RATS.

It is a blazing hot afternoon and the stones on Tower Hill are baking in the sun, while the effigy of an able-bodied seaman, which stands attired in a full suit of nautical garments at the outfitter's door, looks quite natural, as though his painted wooden cheeks were burning with a tropical glow, and his widely staring eyes had caught sight of a green coast somewhere beyond Katharine Steam Wharf or in the far regions of Shad Thames.

Very different indeed is the appearance of the real sailor who, with only one shoe and a broad isthmus of flannel shirt between his canvas trousers and his short jacket, has just been turned out of the tavern where some of his more peaceable companions are lounging on the rough wooden settles, and smoking pipefuls of "hard" which they cut from a flat cake with their clasp-knives. The mariner who has just been ejected is of a dark mahogany colour, and as I pass, he follows me for a moment with his lustreless eyes demanding, not without imprecations, what I have to say to him. In truth I have nothing to say to him, and so he leans shoeless against a neighbouring post till two of his companions come out and lead him away.

It is so warm that the herbalist at the corner has retired from his open stall in the street where he advertises pills and extract of sarsaparilla, and sits at the moment beneath a powerfully odorous bower of dried camomiles, wormwood,

and featherfew; the unctuous raspberry puffs frizzle on the tin outside the pastrycook's door, the ginger beer bottles are too hot to touch without a cloth, and even the touter at the photographic establishment stands under the shade of a neighbouring awning, as he reflects jack-o'-lanterns up and down the pavement from the specimen portraits in his hand.

One or two vendors of Persian sherbet drive a very fair trade on the hill, but the hawkers of combs and caps, the dealer in razor paste, and the merchant who for a penny disposes of "the gold wedding ring, the broad belcher ring, the scarf pin, the something funny and something curious, the sheet of songs, the little bit of magic by Doctor Bokanky, and to make the lot complete the model farthing with a complete set of teaspoons inside," can find few passengers to listen to him.

The file of soldiers exercising in the Tower ditch, must wish themselves in the place of those other soldiers, open-throated and unbraced, who are just now busy receiving stores.

Red faced men coming out of the Saint Katharine Docks where they have been with tasting orders, pause for a minute or two in the dim twilight of the great office at the entrance, and catching sight of the blazing strip of sunlight revealed by the half-opened door, wish they could have stayed in the cellars to witness the overdrawing of the last cask.

But one suggestion of coolness is discernible in the whole stony area and that is the pump in Postern Row, at which an arid charity boy has just performed a hasty ablution, using his cap for a towel, and filling his half boots before he goes on his way.

Up by America Square there is a brisk business going

on at the sailors' shipping office, however, and round the door stand smart, sunburnt, white-shirted mates, in new blue jackets and light deck pumps; greasy, red shirted, loose jointed mulattos, who grin till the light radiates from their white teeth; swarthy Portuguese with shining hair and gold earrings; yellow-haired lumbering Swedes with silver rings upon their fore-fingers; and lowering roughly-clad Yankees with a great display of rusty Wellington boots, and sheath knife.

Up in the close unfurnished office on the first floor, the captains are busy taking down names and settling questions of wages. Most of the men who stroll in and out as it comes to their turn, or lounge against the walls and expectorate across the pavement, mean business. Some of them have just come from visiting their friends; others, with a strong family likeness to my one-shoed friend in the next street, have "had their spree out" ashore, and after a three weeks debauch come here with so few clothes as they stand in, even these garments having with difficulty been saved from the crimp and the bully at that brothel in "TIGER BAY" where they have almost lost count of time, and from which they were turned, half-naked, into the street two nights ago.

It is doubtful whether any prize money is now devoted to those amusements which are said to have been at one time so prevalent amongst the "jolly Jack tars" returning from a cruise on Her Majesty's Service, that is to say, in the frying of watches or the eating of bank notes between bread and butter. It is doubtful whether in London at all events, the navy men are so much given to ordering "a hackney coach, a lass, and a fiddler" directly they set foot on shore; but as I stand here at the street corner, I am led to believe that the men of our mercantile marine, fling

away their hardly earned wages in a way scarcely less sensible, and quite as brutalizing. All honour to those who have instituted and still promote the establishment of Sailors' Homes, for they have effected incalculable benefits, but much remains to be done for the protection of those poor fellows who coming from the long monotony and hardship of a sea-voyage, are ready to accept any dishonest hand, and to hear with unconcealed pleasure the lying salutations of the "runner," and to fall at once into the trap of the procuress and her myrmidons.

Having nobody else to ask, I am led just now to inquire of myself whether we do not all take it for granted that Jack likes this low dissipation, and would resent any attempt to interfere with it;—that he goes into the Highway, and haunts the purlieus of St. George's-in-the-East, with a complete knowledge of what he is about; whether, in fact, this kind of life is not what he has been looking forward to with pleasant anticipations as he sweltered in some slow craft under a tropical sky for long months, or shivered in a "wet ship" during the nights of a wintry voyage; whether, in fact, the close, filthy dens of Bluegate Fields and Gravel Lane, with their associations of brazen, foul-mouthed women and skulking men; the gas-lighted, sanded-floored rooms of reeking pothouses, where gaudy strumpets dance before him as he bemuddles himself with drugged drink, have not come with some sort of solace to his imagination as he lay out upon the yard in a driving rain, and tried to hold a frozen sail with frost-bitten fingers? The truth seems to me to be that the sailor, coming home after a weary voyage, finds himself cast loose on London with all the strangeness of a schoolboy in holiday time, but with the disadvantage of having quite the wrong people to look after his boxes;

people who hail the return of the prodigal to prodigality, and make him pay handsomely for a very small slice of the fatted calf with which they reward his easy good-nature. He knows all this, and often resents it in rough language ; but they soon know how to quiet him, and—struggle as he may—he is carried off to within a mile of the very place where he first sets foot on shore, and takes his pleasure amidst the vilest company of the vilest part of London.

He knows it all : knows it so well that if I should be so foolish as to go over at this moment to that red-eyed, ragged-haired fellow who is just now listlessly regarding his last twopence with half an eye on the trolloping wench who has left him at the corner ; if I should go over to him and speak of his folly, he would condemn the principal part of my anatomy, and ask me what business it was of mine. Then, relenting, he would say that I might mean well, and referring to his own eyes with the same imprecation, ask, How the (strong language) he was to help it ? Yes, yes, they know it ; and instead of regarding their life ashore in a rose-coloured medium while they are slaving away at sea, their bitter recollections of it survive in the old fo’c’sle song, the melancholy burden of which seems to sound in my ears with a hum like that of a worn-out and dissipated bee.

“It’s now three years that we’ve been out,
I think it’s time we tacked about,
And when old England’s shores we see,
Oh won’t we have a jolly, jolly, spree,
For we are homeward bo-o-ound,
For we are homeward bound.

“And when we get to the London Docks,
There we shall see the girls in flocks,

One to another they will say,
'Welcome Jack with his three years' pay,'
For he is homeward bound.

"And then we go to the Lamb and Bell,
Where very good liquor they do sell;
In comes the landlord with a smile,
Saying 'Sit down, Jack, it's worth your while,'
For you are homeward bound.

"But when your money is all spent,
And there's nothing to be borrowed, and nothing to be lent,
In comes the landlord with a frown,
Saying 'Get up, Jack, let John sit down,'
For you are *oulward* bound.

"And so poor Jack, without a crown,
And scarce a place to sit him down,
Is quite cleared out of all his store,
So goes to sea to work for more,
For he is outward bound."

While I am thinking of songs, it occurs to me that Jack is also aware that the "lasses" who are, under favorable circumstances, so willing to have it believed that they are amongst those "who love a sailor," are by no means disinterested in their affection, but are, in his bitter experiences, wretched harpies to whom he is consigned, for the sake of plunder. How it should happen that he represents himself as faring better in this respect in another latitude I am at present unable to determine, but he certainly sings of his fair companions at Valparaiso, not only that

"They far exceed your English girls in fine heads of hair,"

but also that

"They are not like your English girls, who will on you impose,
And when your money is all spent, will go and pawn your clothes."

Yes, the land rats are always hungry and are always waiting for Jack. Once off the deck, and even before he steps on the quay, he is eyed by artful crimps, who will take him where he may get a fresh rig out, will introduce him to a lodging and a lodging-house keeper, who thereupon fastens upon him until he is penniless and almost shoeless ; for her house is a brothel, and her other lodgers are supplied with those gaudy wardrobes which dazzle Jack at the "London Docks," or their vicinity. When the crimp and "the young women," and the "good old soul," who will make him comfortable, fail to "clear out his store," the "runner" lies in wait for him, and, under the promise of getting him a ship, takes his last rag and his last penny, or, as things have gone lately, persuades him to desert from our own navy, or snaps him up for the American Federal service ; perhaps for the Confederate service, for it is pretty openly rumoured in "the Highway," by which I mean Ratcliffe Highway, that the crew of the Alabama were most of them known to hail from the neighbourhood of Wellclose Square.

Am I not almost within sight of the house of one who is now on his trial for enlisting sailors for the American navy ? A house in which numbers of men sleep crowded into hutches little better than the "bunks" that they have just left. A house into which the police have scarcely dared to venture, lest they might find themselves subject to "a hurried gash with a hasty knife," as they went up the narrow stairs, or stood in the midst of threatening desperadoes on the landings ?

But the last man, or rather boy (for a pudding-faced tow-haired youth he is), has just left the office, and I turn away to follow Jack to those holes where land rats and water rats are waiting to gnaw at him.

Rosemary Lane is, perhaps, little more savoury for having become known as Royal Mint Street; but I miss to-day one of its usual concomitants of unsavoriness. There are the emporiums for rough seafaring clothes, duck trousers, sailor's slops, and Guernsey shirts, where sharp Jewish boys catch my wandering eye, and thinking that I can be looking for nothing in the world but a garment of hairy pilot cloth lined with plaid flannel, as an appropriate costume for the time of year, call for assistance to take it down, and dodge round me in an almost successful endeavour to land me in the shadow of a tarpauline tabernacle in the back premises.

There are the low-browed shutterless shops, where the same sort of clothes—many of them patched and mended, and white in the seams, and stained and tarry,—are for sale second-hand, leading me again to think of poor Jack, whose store has been cleared out; and of some other poor Jack, reduced to a similar condition, but yet outward bound, and with a little cash advanced for a miserable threadbare outfit. There are the “marine store” shops, with a rusty, dusty, fusty collection of odds and ends, heaped together on a dirty board in front of the pavement, including tools long past use, hundreds of keys which will turn in no lock, and a like number of locks in which no key will turn; there are the greengrocers, with flabby, decaying cabbages, and the offscourings of potatoes; there is the little, beetling den, where saveloys and sheep's livers, thin dark-coloured tripe, and yellowish cow-heels, alternate with fried fish, briny cod, and salted cucumbers; there are the high windows, where stale fly-blown cakes and tarts, and a few unwholesome looking pies, occupy the side which is not devoted to a peculiar loaf, known, I should think, only to this locality, and perhaps invented

originally as a substitute for Christmas pudding,—a square loaf, studded with large raisins at considerable intervals. There are all these, and there are the barbers, with frowsy collections of small wares displayed without ostentation; and there are the two or three dingy taverns, where I have seldom seen anybody stay to drink for a longer time than is consumed in dispatching the third of a quartern of gin. “They don’t stay long, but they come often,” I am informed, and one of the customers is now emerging, in the shape of an Irish dealer in firewood, who is red and tangled as to his hair, open as to his throat, bleared in the eyes, and regardless of the fact that he is walking about in a pair of white cotton stockings, and only one carpet slipper. Two or three women, shrill and voluble, hail him as he crosses the road, and after a few words, which seem likely to end in a quarrel, they all adjourn together to another tavern a little further on, whence one of the party presently comes out again, with her hair all over her face, and a bleeding lip, for which she is vowing vengeance. This distracts my attention, but I am still conscious of a want. Where are the casks and barrels of pork which I have seen so often standing here in the open street—the heads knocked out,—and the wet flabby chaps, and inferior segments of pigs overflowing into the street; the yellowish-brown fat and black lean, half floating in discoloured brine? These are some of the familiar accessories of Royal Mint Street, and I wonder whether their absence is to be attributed to the rise in provisions through the American war, or to a deficiency of returned barrack and old ship stores from the contractors? From whatever cause the scarcity may arise, I cannot help believing that the absence of such quantities of this provender as are usually found here, must seriously reduce the consumption

of meat in the neighbourhood, and may perhaps also reduce the Registrar's returns by a few official items during the bad weather.

The bluebottles seem to miss these oozy casks too, for they assemble in inconvenient numbers on the wooden trays where the other meaty dainties of the district are displayed, and a stray fly paper hanging here and there, seems to have as little influence to deter them as this great printed bill, posted under the railway arch, and referring to a recent murder, has upon the criminal population.

The railway here, as elsewhere, has cut through the very centre of the neighbourhood, sweeping before it a number of foul streets and blind alleys, of the existence of which few people had any knowledge until they were laid bare, and some few glimpses of their wretchedness were obtained during a journey which commences amidst second-floor windows, and reveals a hideous series of back yards and ruinous tenements without yards at all. It is often attributed to railway works in the metropolis, as an offset in their favour against the fact of their making their own bye-laws, and not keeping them, that they clear out the low neighbourhoods, and make a clean sweep of the vice and crime which finds a haunt there. It would be well, perhaps, to consider where the vice and crime is swept to, and whether, when it is really cleared out, it does not gain a greater immunity by being scattered, than it can command by being under a direct supervision. Apart from this, however, there are but few instances where so clean a sweep is actually made. Behind some of the great houses—the law courts and the public buildings towards the western end of London; beyond the mews, and a little away from the small shopkeepers, lie some of

the worst and most dangerous dens of the metropolis; and similarly, when the railway arch spans a broad thoroughfare, and stretches its bare face of brick and mortar into adjoining streets, casual passengers, seeing the broader space, and hearing the puff and scream of the passing train, believe that the neighbourhood has been altered both in its physical and moral aspects. Let any one take the trouble to find out the second or third arch, and he will see how the miserable tenements have refused to be shouldered out of the way; how blind alleys have become blinder by being built in under the deep shadows of the dead walls, and how the very opening which has made more room for ordinary traffic, has also shut out from the casual gaze all the savage wretchedness which cowers behind the ramparts of civilization.

I can see it now, although the evening has fallen, and the few lamps have begun to be lighted. It is here, in groups of women sitting on the flagstones, at the doors, or lounging together at the street corners, and staring at me as I pass; in the half-naked and wholly filthy children still scrambling in the gutters; in the unshorn shock-headed men who echo the shrill laugh of the women with an oath; in the pinched, careworn look of poverty which comes in with an empty basket, and tries its hardest to keep apart from the vice and crime that everywhere surrounds it; in the vegetable and other refuse in streets apparently unvisited by the scavenger, as I should think they were by the officer of health, if such a functionary is known hereabout; above all, in the two or three dimly lighted, silent spaces where a few half-ruined hovels are built round a few yards of stone area, and the only sound to be heard, is the low whistle which from some dark nook heralds my approach, or the sudden shut-

ting of a door, as some slinking figure glides within its shadow.

There is little to excite curiosity within the houses, as far as their furniture is concerned; the dirty, broken stair, the crumbling plaster on the walls, the ceilings black and cracked, the windows pieced out with rags and newspapers, have the usual family likeness to all such dwellings.

Many, perhaps most, of these tenements are inhabited by the Irish, and the furniture consists of a few coarse substitutes for bedding, seldom accompanied with a bedstead, while the one room in which a whole family, perhaps with an occasional lodger, will live and sleep, contains but a couple of rickety chairs, a few articles of broken crockery, an old deal table, a battered kettle, and an iron pot, in which the meals are cooked upon four bricks which answer the purpose of a stove in the bare fire-place. It would be difficult to learn what occupation most of the people follow, but many of the men are employed at the docks in casual labour, and the families alternate between their present mode of living and pauperism, or vagrancy. In other cases, Irish Mike carries a hod, while his wife sits behind a fruit-stall at some street corner, and between them they make a better income than many a decent mechanic, for a tolerably pitched street stall is often worth £1 a week. This class of Irish people are more seldom found here, however, than about Tooley Street, and in the streets leading from the Borough, while more of them live in Spitalfields. The children, who are mostly left all day to shift how they can, are made use of by being sent out, even at the tenderest age, to sell cigar-lights, or bunches of flowers, or on Saturday nights in crowded thoroughfares, like Shoreditch and

Whitechapel, to dispose of bunches of onions and pot-herbs. These children infest London streets to the annoyance of the police, who cannot take them in custody in consequence of their being mere infants, while any interference is often resented on the part of benevolent passengers, who see no reason why the poor little creatures should not earn an honest living.

The crossing-sweepers, bare-footed and half-naked, who on week-day splash the mud from side to side with the stump of an old broom, and fight and quarrel and whine for half-pence; the young vagabonds who turn somersaults on the pavements; the little children who follow you with cigar-lights or lucifers, and dodge in front of your feet till you are glad to get rid of them and a loose penny at the same time; the poor half-starved ownerless little ones who hang about the markets and pick out everything eatable and saleable from the refuse—all these have amongst them representatives of the families of the Irish labourer, or of the regular London cadger, whose nationality is merged into a cosmopolitan spirit of idleness.

Anybody who has had the curiosity to watch these miserable little hucksters about the railway stations, and especially in the city streets, will have had some reason to believe that their "honest living" had better, for the interests of the community, be transferred to some other direction. Standing by the terminus of the North London Railway, for instance, you may witness the periodical visits of slinking and bedraggled women—weedy as to their apparel, and with the attenuation and pallid hue of much gin in their faces—who come to take of one or other of these poor little wretches the money that they have "picked up" during the day. Any one of these women may be the mother of one or more of the children, or may

merely employ them at the trade of cadging, but the result is the same in most instances. Sometimes she brings them slices of coarse bread and butter wrapped in a dingy handkerchief; occasionally a heavy-eyed, sodden-looking man will wait for her at the nearest street corner, or, in her absence may himself secure the few coppers which he extorts from the child, with an anxious glance round him lest he should be observed; both he and the woman, should they catch the eye of a passenger during their operations, will assume an expression of demure, poverty-stricken resignation, and affect to wipe away a tear as they contrive to display, by well-affected accident, the bread and butter that they have "gone without themselves" to bring to the "poor hungry things." Mostly, however, they will avoid observation by returning beneath doorways, or stealthily pushing the child before them into some bye-place where there is nobody to interrupt them. What wonder that these miserable juveniles soon try to "go on their own hook," and when they cannot start with a box or two of vesuvians take to pilfering from shop-doors, or laden waggons, steal old iron from the carts about the wharves at Bankside, extract mussels or chestnuts from the porters' loads as they come up from the ships at Billingsgate, and become a pest with which society and the law find it difficult to deal. What are the police to do with prisoners "whose heads," as the reporters say, "scarcely reach to the top of the dock?" Some of their heads are scarcely higher than one's knee, and all that can be done with such infantile offenders is to take them to the office and confront them with the Inspector, who frightens them a little before he lets them run away. Who is their father? Michael Murphy, or Dick, or Old Sam, or they don't know, *they* don't; but they won't do it any more.

Mother! why she's at home in George's Yard, or Bull's Rents; or "she's bad in the hospital," or "she's somewhere a waiting" for them, and she'll beat 'em; and they "haven't had any dinner, and only a bit o' bread since yesterday morning." Police officers and inspectors have hearts, and many of them have wives and children at home. "God help the little rascals" they think, "for nobody here seems likely to;" and so they go out buttoning their coats and wishing—not unrighteously—that the slinking woman who is waiting at the very street corner would do something to bring her under the power of the law; for the children had better be in prison, aye, had better even be in the worst workhouse than thrown as they are upon the streets. For what becomes of scores of these? They are the raw materials of which thieves and convicts are made. Their training commences with the first whine which they are taught to sound at the elbow of the street passenger who looks down at the wistful face of the brat who has followed him so far.

Those who have had a long acquaintance with London streets, and have been given to observe these things, will have been able to identify some of these baby faces, to girlhood, boyhood, womanhood,—through all the gradations of vesuvians, bundles of flowers, crossing-sweeping, begging, and combs. Heaven forbid that I should say of all the poor street-sellers who try to gain their daily bread by vending toys, tools, tapes, pencils, pocket-books, and the like, in this great city, are either dishonest, or of bad repute. They are not the parents of these children. I am speaking of the young Arabs of the London streets, whose destiny is to become artful thieves, and the mistresses of thieves, or to develop into the lowest ruffianism, and the most hopeless prostitution. The girls, espe-

cially, begin very early to show the evil fruits of such a training. It is curious to discover how they can discriminate between likely and unlikely customers. Upon the man (they scarcely ever notice women) whose face is familiar to them they will merely bestow an inquiring look and a half impudent gesture, on the chance of his throwing them a penny; but watch them scud across the road after a provincial visitor, a foreigner, or a sailor; see them hang about the doorways of city offices, where merchant captains and foreign mates have business. Listen, if you can, to the wheedling tone and evil leers with which they offer combs or other wares; and to the sudden burst of half-whispered indecency with which they close their appeals, especially if they are unsuccessful. Many of these girls are as well known in the city as the Lord Mayor himself, and some of them alternate between the prison and the streets, until they are lost in the tide which sweeps them into the broad stream of crime, and takes them from the common lodging-house to the common brothel, many intermediate steps towards which have been expedited by old debauchees whom they have met accidentally, and to whom their indecent language and abandoned indifference to modesty have been a fresh stimulus and a piquant gratification.

The opponents of a State education, as they look at these poor neglected children, from their very earliest infancy the prey of dissolute parents, or the property of mercenary wretches who live upon their misery would do well to reflect, whether to be taught thus early, even without a creed and without the whisper of a doctrine, would not be a better training for good, than that merely superficial instruction which they will be compelled to undergo in the schoolroom of the gaol, or that

course of private reading which they will at last obtain in the convict's cell.

Deeply pondering these things as I turn away, I am reminded of a boy who once attracted my attention on a visit to a Ragged School. His attendance at that institution was, I have reason to believe, precarious; and, on the occasion to which I refer, he presented a remarkably lively and sharp appearance, in consequence of the extreme shortness of his hair, a circumstance which elicited much jocularity from his companions. In the course of the evening's instruction, I remarked that he possessed a considerable acquaintance with the Scriptures, and could even continue the quotations which were commenced by the teacher with perfect facility.

Venturing to refer to this proficiency with some little surprise, his sharp gray eyes looked into my face with a half impudent, half listless expression as he replied—

“Well, you see, sir, we haven't got anything else to read where I come from.”

Foolishly, as I think now, I made the common-place remark that he should have endeavoured to profit more by such an acquaintance with Holy Writ.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “we all ought to do that; but, somehow, you see we don't—it's our wickedness—that's just it, isn't it?”

VI.

THE NEVER SILENT HIGHWAY.

It has grown so dark that the few gas-lamps scarcely serve to guide me through the narrow streets and square tanks of wretched hovels which seem to be huddled together behind the railway arches. I am in some danger of treading on the women and children who crouch at the doorways, or stand talking listlessly at the street corners, as though they were waiting for something which would never come. Imperfect as the light is, however, I find myself wondering what could have been the condition of these places before the gas-pipes were laid there, when the stranger who wandered out of his way must have been at the mercy of any half dozen ruffians who might make a simultaneous rush from the narrow courts which even now are scarcely to be distinguished from the entries of the adjacent houses.

In the broad thoroughfare of Leman Street, I discover that a sultry breeze is sweeping the dust before it, and the night's traffic has set in, comprising such of the neighbouring population as are bound for their evening's amusement to Whitechapel. From the open windows in the first story of a brilliantly lighted tavern, there come sounds of such revelry as belongs to a harmonic meeting; and by a perusal of a bill in the window, over which I can see a select party who have begun the evening, and are at high words already, I learn that the renowned Mr. Somebody has, by the kind permission of Mr. Somebody Else,

consented to delight the world in this locality with his celebrated "buffo" songs; I am informed also that a Master Jackman, known as the Little Wonder, will appear in his unsurpassed performance on a whole orchestra of instruments, while some other "artistes," whose names are a guarantee for the arduous efforts of the spirited proprietor, will on this particular evening interpret not only Shakespeare and the musical glasses, but both English and Italian opera, to say nothing of melodrama, as exhibited in that soul-stirring ballad "The Forsaken Gipsy." By a footnote with three stars at the bottom of the bill, I discover that amateurs are respectfully invited to join in the harmony of the evening; and as the talented Mrs. Materboy, and the equally distinguished artiste Miss Flora McIvor are to preside in turns at the pianoforte, there is good reason for believing that such a host of talent has seldom been secured in the locality.

They are hard at it already, as the sudden rat-tat of the chairman's hammer, and his emphatic demand for order while Mr. Somebody obliges with a song, abundantly testify. There is a good deal of Mr. Somebody's song, and more of pianoforte accompaniment, and still more of general harmonic chorus, which has a tendency to get out of time, and is only brought up sharp by the rat-tat of the hammer again; but it is only when one of the amateurs presently consents to oblige amidst a great rattling of glasses and thumping of pint pots, that the chorus develops its full perfections; the company evidently regarding the singer as one of themselves, and being determined to support her (for it is a lady) with the united strength of some forty pairs of lungs, more or less powerful, and with a knowledge of the tune, which at once marks it as a popular favorite.

Out here in the roadway another singer is ineffectually endeavouring to attract the attention of the passengers by an operatic air ; but she has slunk to the opposite side of the street, where the houses are darker, and a few small shopkeepers are just visible behind their counters. As she trills "Sweet speeryit, he-ear my per-ayer," in a thin weak voice, it is evident that she once, at all events, had some musical taste, and even now her notes are so sweet and clear that they are heard above all the riot of the harmonic meeting which booms harshly from those open windows. There is something so melancholy in her wailing song, and her thin stooping figure, with its scanty weedy drapery, that I turn away, and find that I have been unconscious of the advancing tramp of feet through a paved yard close by.

The house before the railings of which I am standing reminds me of a doctor's which has been transformed into a dispensary, for its dark green door bears a neat brass plate, and, though the windows on each side are furnished with iron bars, they seem to indicate the bare consulting rooms with which I am familiar in connection with many public medical charities.

Turning round to look at them, however, I see that the railings of the area are furnished with a board on which several bills give a still sterner reality to the place. One of them is a smaller edition of the poster under the railway arch, offering a reward for the apprehension of a murderer, while the rest contain particulars of robberies, and detailed descriptions of the bodies of persons found drowned. There is something inexpressibly grim and repulsive in these forms, where the particulars of height, colour of hair, "marks, if any," and "how dressed," are all filled in with such accuracy as the first

inspection of the body will permit; but I am disturbed in my contemplation of them by the tramping I have just heard, and the steady egress of a line of policemen filing off for night duty. The place is, in fact, no other than the Leman Street Police Station, and, as I have to make a call there, I proceed up the paved passage, and into a square yard at the end, where some children are playing near the stone steps which lead to the office;—a large square hall, with a desk in the centre; an oval space, enclosed with strong iron railings, and furnished with an iron wicket to admit newly charged prisoners; and a narrow, hot, slip of a room, from which the officer on duty (generally an inspector) looks out from a glass partition, and, after hearing the accusations, enters the cases in the charge sheet. The oval iron fold (which is a necessary provision for the black sheep of this district) is at present occupied by a man who, beyond a cap, a shirt, and a pair of trowsers, is free from any personal effects, except a dirty bag which lies just outside. He has been charged with breaking a window at a public-house, in consequence (as he alleges) of some water having been thrown upon him as he stood outside the door engaged in settling an old standing quarrel with somebody not present.

This is verified by a voluntary and respectable witness, who, as a matter of justice, thinks it well to state that he saw the water thrown; but whose sense of equity will not permit him to sustain the inconvenience of appearing before the magistrate in the morning on behalf of the prisoner. The prisoner, who, to tell the truth, has an honest, poor, but self-assertive and, at the same time, indifferent manner, is candour itself.

He gets his living by picking up rags and rubbish in the street. He works when he can find work. There's

nothing in the bag; oh! the officer can look at it, he ain't got nothing upon him, all he had being the scrap of rusty iron, which the policeman who took the charge is now holding in his hand.

He sleeps where he can. Where did he sleep last night? Why, at Mile End workus, which is his parish, and where they take him in when he can't sleep nowhere else. Oh, he's poor, he knows that. He can read and write a little. Yes, he did crack the window; he don't wan't to tell no lie about it. Broke it becos they throw'd water out upon him. Worth seven or eight shillins, is it? Well, there's One above as knows all, and it 'll come down upon the person who wants to lock him up.

The person who makes the charge is certainly not a prepossessing person, and insists on leaving him there, so he is removed, apparently not much to his dissatisfaction, to a cell, where he hopes they won't leave him long before he has something to eat. I learn that he will have something before morning, a little bread and butter and some coffee, and I am as glad to know this, as I am to observe with what patient forbearance, and, except when either the prisoner or the accuser departs from the question, with what a very quiet manner the inspector in charge conducts the short examination. Going round to visit the cells presently, I see a man sitting in one of them, with the same stolid stare, and the same dogged maintenance of one position as I have noticed in other prisoners at other places. The new arrival asks for some water, and is supplied with a tin full, and though the bench on which he lies is hard, and the wooden block which forms the pillow uninviting, the cell itself is clean and well ventilated, as, indeed, it need be, since before morning it may receive four or five other inmates. Some

of them are coming in even while I turn to look at the handcuffs and the cutlasses hanging over the chimney-piece in the office. There is a good deal of bleeding in this new party, but that is a common occurrence at Lemon Street, where it often happens that policemen, accusers, and prisoners, are all more or less wounded; for the knife and the bludgeon are institutions of St. George's-in-the-East, and the police station on these occasions is like a butcher's shambles.

The prisoner on this occasion is a slouching ill-conditioned fellow, in tight corduroys, and a loose linen jacket, made like that of a stableman, and the prosecutor is a voluble woman, with a loud high voice, a defiant breathless manner, and disordered hair.

What's he been doing? why, he has knocked her down; he knows what he 'done' to her.

Well, what has he done?

Why, he knocked her down in the street, and stole the shawl off her back, and went and pawned it.

Does she live with him?

Yes, she does, or leastways she did; but she's been away from him now for this five months; only he thinks he can come whenever he likes and knock her about, and take away anything that she's earned; he thinks he can, he's done it three or four times; but now he shall see whether he's to give her a black eye and knock her down and steal her shawl.

Did he buy the shawl for her?

No; her husband bought it;—a man that's dead and rotten in his grave.

Then she's a widow?

Yes, she is.

And she has been living with this man?

She has *so* ; more fool she.

What has become of the shawl?

Why he went right off and pawned it for six shillings, and a little girl brought her the ticket ; a little thing five year old brought it just as she come out, for she'd caught sight of him and run after him.

Did she mean to lock him up?

She did so, there was no mistake about it.

She had better make up her mind about that, because it often happened that people came there and made it all up afterwards, and gave the police a great deal of trouble for nothing.

Well all she wanted was her shawl, and she had the ticket.

What did the prisoner do for his living?

Why he stole, she believed. Ah, he might look at her, but she wasn't going to be afraid of him again, nor yet to be knocked down at his pleasure, and have all her goods took away. She worked hard, as the police knew ; they might see her working outside her door early and late.

What at?

Why, at the mat making ; and she lived near the green-yard.

During this time the prisoner stood with a hang-dog look upon his lowering face, which he attempted now and then to force into an expression of deprecation as though he were really shocked at the depravity of the witness.

What is he?

Why, he works at what he can get to do.

What has he had to do lately?

He's been working as a stevedore, and lodging at a common lodging-house.

Did he live with this woman?

He used to, but he left her months ago, and hasn't seen much of her lately. Not a word she says about him is true.

On being asked whether she intends to leave him there, she has evidently begun to relent; but on his injudiciously calling her a liar, she retorts upon him that he knows he is a thief; and asks what he did to the black man, the sailor that he robbed last Thursday, coupling the question with the information that a member of the detective force knows all about him, and is looking after him.

Under these circumstances the inspector makes known his intention of keeping the prisoner till that detective comes in, for he is expected presently; and the woman, who is evidently relenting, again goes out into the yard and pants and snuffs the air as much like some wild animal which has recovered from the excitement of the chase as anything I ever saw. In two or three hours' time it is quite likely that she will decline to press the charge, and they perhaps will go away together to drink or quarrel, or to drink and separate, until he shall have made up his mind to commit some fresh outrage. There I leave him, however, shut up in the oval iron pen sullenly awaiting the arrival of the detective, and only now and then attracting the notice of the officer in charge, who will have to sit there in that close room beneath the flaring gas all night long, with, perhaps, a few minutes' rest in the large-cushioned windsor chair, but with a ready eye and a quick appreciation of those who come and go or come and stay, while he questions, reprimands, exhorts, denies, threatens, or even encourages, as the nature of each case demands. He is a quiet, serious-looking officer, too, with a steady compactness which seems to me to be both his mental and physical qualification; but he is well acquainted with

those who are the principal customers at this station, and his quiet, subdued, even voice rises sometimes to a very demonstrative tone, and his cool gray eye somewhat changes in expression when either prisoner or accuser become mischievous, or evidently desire to pervert the ends of justice. For twenty-four hours will he himself be imprisoned in this close stifled room, except for such time as he will go his nightly round and visit the constables in his district, to which journey he refers as he bids me good-night, and hints at the probability of my "coming across him" somewhere towards eleven or twelve o'clock.

The clock is now striking ten, and as I turn out of the main thoroughfare I find that Jack, for whom so many evil disposed people are waiting, is all alive; as much alive, that is, as he can be in smoke-dimmed public-houses, the heated atmosphere of rooms with sanded floors, and a crowd of people perspiring under the flare of hissing gas. At the great music-hall round here, near Wellclose Square, he is in great force, and a score of flashily-dressed women, hard of feature and unflinching of eye, are waiting about the lobby at the top of the stairs. Strange as it may seem, however, I find myself making comparisons in their favour between these Polls and Nancys and Sues of Wapping and Ratcliffe, and their wretched sisterhood at the night haunts of the western end of London. They are mostly distinguished by less sickly looks, and by an absence of that horrible attempt to assume a languid and fascinating manner which in the harlots of the Haymarket alternates with the lowest degradation of language and the most offensive suggestion of immorality. There is, perhaps, more of the brute about some of these girls, but they are so much the better for it, as the brute is better than the utterly perverted and listlessly abandoned human being. I notice few such wheed-

ling tones and shameful seductions as anybody may witness in the streets and public places west of Temple Bar, and what there is of coarseness, is, I cannot help thinking, more endurable than these. One other peculiarity I observe, which in a faithful description should scarcely be unmentioned. Many of these women seem to be waiting for certain rough-looking fellows of whom they take undisputed possession, and those best acquainted with the habits of these "unfortunates" know very well that the sailor coming home after a long voyage will often return very faithfully to that partner of his dissipation, who has established a property in him, and who will remain with him sometimes even after "his money is all spent." Just now the gallery is tolerably full, and the tobacco smoke almost obscures the stage where the usual music-hall entertainment is in progress, and the two niggers who have danced a "break down," and mutually played on each other's violins in all sorts of grotesque attitudes, give way to that inevitable comic singer, who, in a melancholy burlesque of fashionable attire, endeavours, for the five thousandth time, to infuse a little sprightliness into a performance of which it is difficult to say whether he or the audience are the most weary. The "respectable people" who occupy the lower part of the hall, from which the disreputable portion of the upstairs company is excluded, sit there silently smoking, or eating and drinking, and seem to have a notion that they are enjoying it; but upstairs Jack sits, for the most part, in a not very lively condition, and his more or less fair companions pay but little heed to what is going on beyond the occasional humming of the tune which is being played, and which they have heard over and over again, these many nights. Some of their number, too, are continually passing in and

out and joining the party in the lobby, where, when their conversation becomes too loud, it is immediately hushed by a tall, muscular, quick-eyed watchful attendant who stands near the door without a coat, and in a remarkably clean shirt, evidently ready to take action for the immediate repression of any improper conduct, or undue disturbance. I am bound to say that the women on the stairs are ready to make way for anybody going in and out, and that, beyond their ordinary bold and half-defiant, though often wistful looks, there is nothing in their manner to which the visitor need take objection.

I had noticed in turning the street corner into the short avenue where this Music Hall is open, that the people hereabout, that is to say, the dealers in fried and shell fish, the fruiterers, the pie-shop keepers, and the shifting loungers around doors and at street corners, all regarded me as a comparative stranger to the locality, and that although in most places I could contrive to pass without special notice, there was first a lull in their conversation and afterwards a sudden and unnatural resumption of loud talking as I went by. I lose the sense of this however as I turn into the public house to whose open doors I am attracted by the sounds of a howling fiddle, an insane cornet, and a melancholy mad clarionet; for the landlord is evidently at ease with regard to his company, and stands outside the bar cooling himself with his white apron tucked up round his waist. He is a German, as many of his neighbours are, a man with a fair, pale, pink face, and a quiet, respectable manner, which I am tolerably sure is not assumed, for it must be remembered that taverns and places of recreation must be kept open for the inhabitants of St. George's, whether the saint be of the East, or of Hanover Square; and although the com-

pany here is neither select nor particular, the crowd of dancers whose feet I can hear shuffling in the room up the flight of stairs at the end of the passage, are just now perhaps less viciously employed than it is their habit to be during any hour of the day or night while they can keep their eyes open. The landlord makes no reference whatever to his customers: either I have come there to see them, in which case there they are without any necessary introduction, or I desire to join in the evening's amusements, and nothing should be more likely. He is a slow, low-voiced man with a rather weary vacuous expression, but as he leans his elbow on the leaden counter it is evident that he possesses great personal strength, and I think that expression of face would change if one of those loose-jacketed countrymen of his from the sugar bakery hard by, should happen to threaten, or to show even the handle of the knife that is hidden under his jacket. But there is little fear of this, for both landlord and landlady (she is a delicate-looking woman, with the traces of late hours, and gaslight, and a close neighbourhood painfully obvious in her thin face, and the dark rims under her eyes) are respectable civil people, with whom nobody but a madman would desire to pick a quarrel, and as some of the girls, flushed by a violent polka, or dishevelled by a rapid "deux temps" bring their partners down to drink in the cooler area of the bar, they speak less noisily and are served, with few words on either side.

There is but little to be seen of Jack here, however; when he is seen at all, he is sitting in a dull and listless fashion, at the tables which are placed round the room where the dancing is going on. It is a long apartment, with a sanded floor, furnished with a few common benches and painted deal tables, and lighted with the jets of gas

that roar and whistle from the commonest of burners suspended from the ceiling. On a small platform, at the upper end of the room, where the wall has once been papered with a dim suggestion of landscape scenery, now nearly obliterated by the dust and friction of the backs of the orchestra, the three instruments before alluded to wheeze and blare and shriek out a tune, to which a number of girls dance in the absence of more than two or three male partners. The few men who stand up are evidently foreigners (the German sugar bakers before mentioned), who solace themselves for long and exhausting labour in the neighbouring refineries by an evening's amusement, which has all the worst, and none of the best elements, of their native *bier-garten*. Only one sailor is joining actively in the festivities, and he is an American; but Jack is more or less represented by two or three blue guernseyed half-washed individuals, who are all leaning on the tables smoking, are all progressing in the various stages of intoxication, and who all regard the gyrations of the rest of the company with a dull stolid stare, which expresses neither surprise nor amusement, nor any interest whatever that I can discover; the same expression, but with an evil influence in it, with which the same men when sober, will lean upon a railing or a stone post or a pier, and look out at the sea, moving only to spit, or to change their pipes to the other sides of their mouths. The more drunk they become, the more stolid becomes this look, the more stony grow their eyes, the more like hard mahogany their faces, until, at last, they are either led half helplessly away, or roused by a word into a furiously quarrelsome temper, in which it is great good fortune if blows and stabs are not exchanged amidst a clamour of shrieking women; a rush of

men to separate the combatants, and a sudden darkness caused by the opportune turning out of the gas.

As a general rule, I find that, while he is here, Jack objects to be spoken to, and replies only by a careless stare or a gruff monosyllable or two, which are generally less complimentary than otherwise. It would be difficult to discover whether he considers, as the Turks do, that the women should dance for his amusement; but of one thing I am assured, that when a sailor *does* dance, he likes it for dancing's sake, almost irrespective of who may be his partner, so long as she is a proficient in the figure; and I have heard a lively enthusiastic steward, after a hornpipe at sea, declare that he'd "rather dance opposite their cook" (who had been, nobody knows how long, about the West India islands), "than with any young woman that ever put on a pair of pumps."

Jack's indifference on the present occasion can scarcely be caused by a scarcity of showy and high-actioned partners either, the most conspicuous being a dark-eyed, olive-cheeked, Jewish-looking sylph, dressed in moonlight satin, which has a remarkable effect in contrast with the place, and with one of her companions at this moment descending for refreshment to the bar, in white muslin with scarlet flowers and trimmings. Most of these girls are well dressed, many of them with the low-necked garments of fashionable life, and an exaggeration of those wreaths and ornaments which are most conspicuous in other ball-rooms. Beyond a somewhat liberal display of shiny boots, morocco slippers, and pink, white, or open-work stockings, there is at this moment little in their manner which differs from that of the pupils in a dancing academy; and as some of the girls dancing together are certainly not more than sixteen years of age, and are evidently of the Israelitish

race, the comparison is all the more obvious. The majority of the company here consists of foreigners, principally of Germans, and Jack is quite in the minority in favour of the sugar bakers, some of whom have just come in from a great factory in an adjoining street, where a number of men sleep on the premises in rooms in which the accommodation has some resemblance to that of a rabbit-burrow. I am surprised by the silence of the company, by the set, almost gloomy faces of the girls, and especially of the younger girls who sit on the forms watching the dancing while they await their turn; this peculiarity, and the flashy splendour of some of their dresses (which must, I think, be referable to their Jewish connections in the wardrobe business), make a singular impression on me, since the whole scene is wonderfully unsuggestive either of low reckless riot, of careless dissipation, or, indeed, of amusement in any shape. I have seldom witnessed more gloomy reserve and apparant seriousness at the most fashionable *thé dansante* where quadrilles were the order of the evening; and though in the Redowa the two white-jacketed Germans jump their partners high into the air at the last note of every figure, not the ghost of a smile flickers on those set and lowering faces which look on, as at some customary but wholly enforced ceremonial observance.

This is the first of the saloons to which I enter, and numbers two, three, and four, are precisely similar, except that they fall by regular gradations to shabbier dresses, dingier and smaller rooms, and in one instance to a drooping company of only six persons, who are wearily waiting for an accession to their numbers and filling up the time by a casual figure or two of any dance which the band may think it worth while to play. Numbers five and six, however, are full to overflowing, and there is a greater

briskness on the part of the company, as liquors go pretty freely up and down the stairs under the superintendence of a couple of athletic potmen and a young woman in a limp white dress. Jack is here in greater force, but has retired, as is his wont, to two or three dim tables near the orchestra, where I can hear him growling monosyllabically. Here too I recognise my dishevelled and one-shoeless acquaintance of Tower Hill, whose eyes have lost their stony stare, by an attempt to combine with it a vague expression of reckless gaiety, little according with features fixed in the immobility of alcoholic drunkenness.

Whether he has a faint impression that we have met before I cannot divine; but with an ineffectual attempt to look at me without being drawn to the contemplation of a gas-light overhead, he asks me what I am going to stand, and at the same time volunteers "the damnedest hiding that I ever had in my life," whereupon—seeing that he is already compelled to lean against a wall in order to keep upright—I take no notice of him, but thread my way through the perspiring crowd, and go out in a gust of tobacco smoke settling towards the door. In a dozen rooms at the ends of passages on the ground floors, or up short flights of stairs, the same characteristics present themselves—women, more or less gaudily dressed, dancing, mostly with other women for a partner; men sitting, almost sullenly, at the tables for the women to join them when the dance is over; a repetition of the same band, the same orchestra,—sometimes with a "set scene" or two, which gives it the appearance of a magnified toy-stage—the same sanded-floor, the same flaring gas. The one exception in my visits of to-night is an ordinary tap-room, where, before the fire in the wide range and in the small clear space in the centre, not occupied by tables and settles, half a dozen

women are dancing to the sound of a fiddle hidden in the corner behind the door. There is but one man present besides myself and the musician, and I can scarcely help thinking that the dancers are enjoying their amusements more than any of those whom I have just left. At all events they are quiet enough, and, just stopping for a moment to look inquiringly as I enter, resume their amusement without any remark. They are all meanly, but cleanly, dressed in well-washed cotton prints, and I am convinced that, if they are waiting for Jack, they will do him less harm than some of the bedizened syrens who are just beginning to make themselves heard a few doors off, under the combined effects of a heated atmosphere and some of the most horribly adulterated spirits which were ever used without the word "poison" on a printed label outside the vessels which hold them. The quality of these fiery drinks is so thoroughly indicated even by their odour, which pervades the place, that I find myself considering how small a quantity of gritty brown brandy, scalding gin, or raw fiery rum, it would take to reduce a stranger to ungovernable insanity, supposing the dose to be repeated nightly in such a temperature as that in which I have been standing. I have no time for speculation, however, for Jack has suddenly woke up, or, having been awakened by his partners, is intent on some other place of amusement, to which he and his party are bound with the view, as I hear him say, of making a "finish of it where there isn't such a (sanguinary) row." As he surges out at the door, surrounded by some of the sylphs in muslins or silks which look less clean and brilliant away from the ball-room gas, I am carried out with him, and stand to give precedence to the party as it goes gruffly and shrilly swearing and laughing up "the Highway." Up "the

Highway" I go myself, and find it in full swing; not that it is a merry, or a jolly, or a contented, or a generally thriving Highway by any means. It is a mad, besotted, miserable, sullen, suspicious, quarrelsome, poverty-stricken, immoral, shambling Highway, for the most part,—its voyagers taking beacon-lights for harbours of refuge, and, when they are not pirates themselves, running into a flotilla of treacherous piratical junks lying hidden everywhere along the coasts, and some of which come boldly out to take their prey in tow under cover of a false signal. Wherever sharks may be waiting for him, however, Jack is still in the same dull, half-besotted mood, at most of the places where I meet with him in this neighbourhood, although the Highway is obviously his own peculiar locality. At some of the dancing saloons here he joins in the festivity, as it were under a kind of protest, but he is certainly less sullen and indifferent, as being on his own ground, and not liable to disadvantage. He is in force at the place where the orchestra is also a stage, on which a young lady in short muslin petticoats performs a ballet by herself, or with a little girl of some seven years old, dressed like a marine-store fairy, in the intervals of selling seed-biscuits and heart-cakes to the company. He particularly affects the long reeking room where there is such a very brisk bar trade down stairs, and that little black-eyed child, with her beautiful, but thin, dark, sharply-cut face and jetty hair, trips down the room in her little white skirts and pink kid slippers after the dance upon the stage, where her father is now waiting to sing a sentimental ballad, and her mother is putting on the rouge behind a screen.

The face of the singer, with its shadow of blue closely shaved beard, and the yellow-greenish marks round the

dark eyes, is bloated and coarsened ; but even as the first notes of the song are sounding on the worn piano, the eyes themselves follow this little slight form with an expression not, I think, altogether free from anxious fear. Good Heaven ! what a place it is for a child ; and yet the tiny feet tread confidently amidst these bold, brazen, shrill women, and their rough hoarse companions, the set smile on the thin lips, and the unflinching look of the large black eyes, where the shadow of the same dark circle rests even thus early, prove that she has learned to look upon this scene as one of nightly experience. Eight years old at most, unless late hours and spirits and water have stunted the proportions of twelve or thirteen to those of childhood. But the little spare figure is so lithe and active—the keen face, with its painfully mature features, has in it also such a baby wistfulness and confidence undergoing the set expression—that, remembering the thousand nurseries where children of her age are innocently asleep, and the thousand happy homes of which we people of England so justly boast as the high distinction of our land, it seems to be a shame, and almost a curse, that this little creature (not of our race, I think, in this instance, but of an older and once a prouder people) should help to earn her own daily bread and her nightly rest in such a place.

It is now nearly eleven o'clock, and her labours are not yet over ; though she is not alone in this, for around all the great theatres in London, in travelling shows and circuses throughout the country, and in saloons and taverns in every part of this great city, scores of children are reared from their earliest infancy to a similar life ; mere babes learn to speculate on the results of the “lucky pitch” of a travelling booth in some market town ; and innocents, who elsewhere would be in the nurses’ arms, have their limbs

trained to contortion, and are sent into a sawdust ring to practise dislocation for a living. In another room a roudy tenor, in a very full dress costume, is singing that celebrated nautical favorite "The Storm;" but though he declares, with a feeble assumption of vigorous expression, that our "de-woted bark lay, all next day, in the Bay of Biscay O!" she might be lying in Ratcliff Highway, and nobody would listen to him. I never made one of such an indifferent audience in my life, except on the few occasions when I have mingled in very fashionable society indeed; and I am not at all surprised that the singer should audibly instruct the orchestra to pitch the key a third lower, for such an inattentive assembly is scarcely worth howling at.

The truth is that the confused murmur of voices, the gradual falling off of the less assiduous dancers, their sudden assumption of seats beside the men, who till now have only favoured them with an occasional remark (often an expletive) as they passed, and the instinctive relaxation of exertions on the part of the potmen and waiters who bring in the liquors, all indicate that the evening's amusements here are drawing to a close. At "Paddy's Goose," a well-known tavern, the original sign of which is supposed to be a swan, but with its present distinctive appellation derived from the legendary mistake of an inquiring Irishman, whose studies in ornithology had been somewhat neglected—at this prosperous place of entertainment the company is at its liveliest, and, as I enter, a young woman, who is just coming away, is generously offering her bouquet to all those amongst the male portion of the assembly who are willing to inhale its fragrance. As it suddenly occurs to me, however, that bouquets are not amongst the usual accompaniments of the fair frequenters of Paddy's Goose, I gracefully decline these delicate attentions, and by this

prudent reserve avoid the plentiful distribution of pepper with which the blooms have been seasoned. I can see, however, that some others have been less fortunate; and a young sailor, a mere boy, with tumbled hair, and an open innocent expression on his round fair face, looks at me with comical appreciation as his eyes stream with tears, and his nostrils burn and quiver under the recent infliction. In another moment, however, I see a girl, of about his own age, quietly go to his side and take tacit possession of him, at the same time assuming a combined air of command and protection. Poor fellow, he is beginning to learn a lesson in a very bad school, and with a teacher who may be as unfortunate as himself.

They keep comparatively early hours in the Highway, so far as their public festivities are concerned, and it is doubtful whether the licensed victualling or unlicensed drinking interests of the neighbourhood will be very seriously affected by the new act for the early closing of such places of entertainment. Up to the last minute of business, however, they drive a brisk trade, which ends with a crowd struggling, leaning, standing, and sustaining every attitude but that of sitting, at the bar. At present that last minute is comparatively remote; and though the dancing has begun to flag, the drinking has recommenced with a vigour which seems to indicate a determination on the part of the company to make the most of the next half hour. In fact, there is very little going on except drinking, for the few dingy shops for the sale of vegetables and butcher's meat and salted fish, which are common to the neighbourhood, seem just now to have little custom—as little custom, indeed, as those other shops where,—in the utter improbability of finding anybody at this time of night to buy dilapidated furniture or strange

odds and ends of second-hand apparel, the proprietors sit at the doors in some of their least rickety chairs, and, perhaps, wait for another sort of business, wherein these lurking youths who pervade the corners of bye streets, or may be seen now and then walking with well-assumed indifference wherever a small crowd may be expected to bear a part.

A sudden shouting, a rush of people into a public-house, the swinging doors of which are almost forced from their hinges by an equal number of people trying to get out. A confused jargon, composed of several languages, above all which sounds the high metallic notes of the Irish tongue, and I find myself in the midst of one of the least reputable mobs of which it has ever been my lot to form a member. What was the origin of the quarrel, and how it has led to a fierce fight amongst half a dozen people, nobody seems to know; but in another minute there is fighting in front of the bar, and presently fighting *behind* the bar, for one of the party has made an onslaught upon the landlord, and is trying to get over the beer-engine, a project which is defeated by the sudden appearance of the landlord's assistant, an active young German, who is presently striking out in the midst of a desperate attack, from which he emerges into the street, dragging the first aggressor with him, and altogether triumphant, but without his shirt, which has been torn off his back.

There is a lull for a moment, and the owner of the Irish voice, who has been using a whole dictionary of epithets to an exasperating foreigner, who replies by saying "Piff, piff," and waving his forefinger contemptuously, suddenly emerges, and proves to be a cleanly dressed portly woman, a little disordered as to her hair, but otherwise mightily unconcerned, and only pleasantly

excited. To me, as to one of the soberest of the party, and therefore most likely to sympathise with her wrongs, she begins to detail how that "it was wid the copper-stick, and she wid the blessed infant in her arrums too ; the mercy that the creature wasn't killed, and she not able to offer the laste resistance." Congratulating her on having got away without being much hurt, she presents the crown of her head for my inspection, with a smile so humorous that I am utterly surprised to see the blood oozing from an ugly cut, and advise her to get away at once, which she with another smile and a nod complies with, especially as the momentary flame of wrath is flickering out, and the people are beginning to disperse. During all this time, however, I have been conscious of the operations of some of the lean, shabby, short-haired, slinking youths before referred to, who were down upon the crowd ; a little flock of jail-birds, intent on obtaining a few stray crumbs even from the pockets of the poor women, round whose shabby gowns I notice their lithe fingers playing as though they were performing on the keys of some strange instrument. I see nobody whom it would seem to be worth their while to rob, although there are one or two sailors inside the house ; but the London thief knows no pity in the way of his profession, and would filch the last penny from the pocket of the poorest woman seeking where to spend it for her morrow's dinner, or would snatch the halfpenny from a starving child looking hungrily into a cook's shop window. As the people begin to disperse, these youths vanish, having, I am pleased to think, been singularly unsuccessful. A small knot of them rejoin each other presently, however, on the cellar-flap of a little dark beer-shop opposite, and keep an apparently careless but deeply interested eye upon the crowd, which

has not yet separated. As they stand there I see another careless figure,—a man wearing a billycock hat, and with the fag end of a cigar in his mouth, and a short piece of a rattan cane swinging in his hand. He is their Nemesis, and, carelessly as they have seemed to eye the crowd, just so indifferently has he been watching them.

Before the warning whistle of the sharpest of the party can serve them, he is across the road in their very midst, and dealing smart cuts to two or three of their number, who dart away each with a stinging souvenir, but, except in one instance, without a word or a cry. The truth is that this lounging observer is a detective officer, known, it would seem, to every man, woman, and child, in that neighbourhood, and with a power of “dropping on” anybody who “is wanted,” which keeps these desperadoes pretty effectually in check. It is evident that the Highway and all the terrible neighbourhood around it is now under a control which may be far from the best influence that might be brought to bear upon it, but which is very effectual in preventing the sort of impunity which a few weeks of unrestricted licence or admitted terror would render this a worse district than the old Alsatia, or even the foul tangle of streets where the London ruffian once held authority at defiance in the neighbourhood of Lincoln’s Inn.

The police are not “out of the way” here, at all events; and, though their presence is not too apparent, they can easily be summoned, and the sound of their rattles will bring speedy aid from their comrades.

There is a danger apart from thieves and bullies and the whole tribe of land and water rats, however, and that danger is at my elbow now; for the fight has broken out afresh, and in place of the high tones and broken exclama-

tions of a wordy quarrel, the voices of the men sound low and guttural. There is a stamping of feet, a scuffling rush, from which the first idle spectators escape to the outer edge of the crowd; long knives are coming from the waistbands of German workmen, or are being unslung from the piece of lanyard which holds them round the bodies of foreign sailors. A police officer has been seen to enter the house some time ago, and as the crowd chokes up the door those outside know that he may have been struck down by a quart pot, stabbed in the back, or felled with an iron shot slung in a silk handkerchief, a conveniently murderous weapon once greatly affected in the Highway. The detective is joined by another acute-looking young man in a peaked cap, who is, I am surprised to learn, on the same duty in the force, and we go back together, ready, but, as far as I am concerned, by no means eager, for a sudden rush to the rescue. I hope it is no confession of cowardice to say that I experience no little relief when I see the crowd open and the first policeman emerge unhurt, while the knives are huddled away again, and the young German, who has put on another shirt, comes outside to cool himself, informing us, with wonder depicted on his face, that, "By Gott, they tried to hit our old man, tried to strike him, to strike *him*!—our old man they did, by Gott; and we wasn't goin' to haf dat."

The Highway is growing lively by this time, for the saloons are about to close for the night, and Jack, having had as much to drink as he can walk under, and being more or less (generally very much less) sober, is escorted by his fair companions to the various "lodgings" where he is waited for in the immediate vicinity.

Mostly without bonnets, and generally with no head-covering at all, except in adverse weather, when they wear

a shawl drawn up in the Irish fashion, these flushed, gaudy women, with their garish shreds of ribbon or artificial flowers, present a strange spectacle in the squalid streets as they pass along in separate groups, shouting hoarsely to such of their companions as they recognise, or shrieking the vilest expletives to be found in their vocabulary, under the frenzy of gin and water on the brain. It is terrible to stand and watch them as they pass, to hear their language, and to think of the lives they lead. It is strange to note how they seem to have cast from them, at this period of the night, any remnant of that seductive manner by which it might be supposed they influence their rough paramours.

In truth, they are often the louder, the coarser, the more vituperative of the two, and Jack's occasional rough oath and brutal manner is utterly cowed and overborne by the shrill torrent of imperative profanity with which he is treated by the syrens who drive rather than lure him to his ruin.

And yet these wretched women—mere girls some of them—steeped in infamy, and sometimes in crime, when others of their sex are ignorant of the ordinary ways of the world outside the playground walls, racked by disease, and going fast to the grave, where they will be taken in a nameless coffin from the dead-house of the union—these women who seem so reckless, and never, if they can avoid it, allow a sober interval to break the fiery monotony of the hell within them, are the slaves of other women older than themselves.

That slinking beldame, with her loose dress only just hanging from her bloated body, is shuffling across the road for her night's supply of liquor before the taverns are closed; and, stopping for a moment to whisper to one of the knot of bullies who are the accursed henchmen of the stew

by which she lives, turns her bloodshot eye with a devilish leer upon the party just entering her doorway. The gaudy dress, the tawdry finery, the scanty meal, the solace of the drugged dram, which for a time banishes memory and burns up remorse—these are hers to give; and the miserable victims of her greed may die or not for aught she cares, unless they are profitable chattels, to be used in the hideous trade she lives by. I say to myself that these things are horrible, for I am conscious at the moment of a most horrible phase of them. Just out of the glare of the light made by a newly opened greengrocer's, where the vegetables are piled in trucks upon the roadway, I see four figures passing beneath the shadow of the houses; two of them are women, sallow, hollow-eyed, slipshod, and with the traces of disease and want in their bent heads and the wretched rags that cover them; between them walks a big, loose-jointed negro—some ship's cook it may be, or a sailor from some distant port—his black face set in a drunken, idiotic grin, which seems to me to have a half-consciousness of shame and hesitation in it too. Behind them walks another being—a woman surely, but so far away from all ordinary associations of womanhood that she seems rather to represent one of the weird fancies of the earlier poets, and might be one of Spenser's hags or either of the witches from Macbeth, coming here to find her foulest charms for a new hell-broth. There is old age in her shuffling gait and bent form—old age in the trembling, skinny hand, with which she points this unfortunate child of Ham the way that he is undoubtedly going—old age in the reedy screech with which she jeers and laughs, and urges him forward, lest even he should suddenly be smitten with horror, and wake too soon from the cursed spell that is upon him.

"Old Peg could tell you some queer stories if you could get hold of her and stand a drain, and give her a bit of tobacco; at least, she could if you could only get her in the humour, for she must be near eighty, and has lived here for years."

"What was she?"

"What was she! Why, a prostitute—one of the regular Polls; nobody knows what she hasn't been."

"What does she do now, then?"

"What does she do! Well, that ain't easy to tell—do anything, if it's only bad enough. What do they all do! Look there."

I *am* looking there, and I see the like of Old Peg as she goes on her way, still with a close resemblance to the witch who seems to have left the affairs of Macbeth in order to marshal sea-cook Othello out of the glare and bustle of the Highway.

I do not care to follow, though I am in reality bound for the same locality, for I have a few more places to visit, a few more streets to pass through, before I reach a neighbouring locality which has also earned an evil reputation.

VII.

TIGER BAY.

THIS portion of thief-London, which has lately been made somewhat prominent by newspaper allusions and descriptive articles respecting a few of its inhabitants, is generally associated in the public mind with dangerous ruffianism and unscrupulous crime. This is, in a sense, true enough; but he who goes to Tiger Bay—a district represented by Brunswick Street, and the thoroughfares or no thoroughfares surrounding it—in the expectation of meeting with roaring, riotous vice, or in fear of sudden and desperate robbery, would altogether mistake the place. It is true that the unsuspecting wayfarer going through some of these dark alleys might be suddenly pounced upon by a couple of ruffians and there and then be robbed and half stifled, but it is not this sort of crime which gives its name to Tiger Bay. The tigers are, for the most part, quiet in their lairs; slinking, watchful, crouching, cruel beasts, who wait there, sharpening their claws, and looking with hungry eyes for the prey that their treacherous she-cats bring down. Jack is their prey chiefly; they half live on him, and he knows it, and so upon these shallows, where he is lured to his destruction, he has bestowed the name of Tiger Bay; for to him the tiger,—as a land animal, to cope with which he is unequal, is more expressive than the shark who meets him on a more congenial element, and therefore,—“Tiger Bay.”

Seen in the morning, Tiger Bay itself wears a worse aspect than it assumes at night, for then are displayed the effects of the previous debauch: outside the doors half-dressed, slatternly women lounge, many of them lolling about the pavement, and even sitting with their feet in the roadway, returning the not always complimentary greetings of their friends who lean out of the windows, or smoke pipes with their elbows resting on the sills. As Jack turns out here and there, and essays to depart, he is too often followed with jeering cries, which, being resented by his particular tigress, lead not seldom to a fight in which women are torn and disfigured, their scanty garments rent and sent to the winds, while men grapple with each other till blood begins to spot the roadway, and the police come upon the scene.

The dwelling-place of the ruffian and the thief—Tiger Bay is not named after these, but takes its name from the brothels and those who keep them—the harpies and harlots who deal with drugged liquor, and the slinking bullies who come, like foul beasts, about the prey.

There are few of these about to-night, however, for Jack is not yet being towed into the Bay, though he is waited for by more than one bloated unwholesome-looking landlady, who lets rooms to “dress lodgers,” which is the West End name for prostitute—by more than one shrivelled crone, who creeps along in the shadow of the houses to fill her nightly gin bottle before the closing of the public-house.

Apart from this, the houses are so quiet and respectable in appearance, just in this locality and at this time, that the casual passenger might imagine them to be the dwellings of decent mechanics. Yet there is something boding, I almost begin to feel that there is something

even startling, in the intense stillness, which, when I learn the truth and see the lights dimly shining through the closed blinds at upper windows, is awfully suggestive of a patient crouching like that of the animal after which the place is named. Coming to a door where a company of young girls are sitting on the step and far out upon the pavement, I am still impressed with this stillness, for they are talking and laughing together in voices so low that they scarcely disturb the street. Not one of them appears to be older than eighteen, the youngest about fourteen; and they too are waiting for Jack. They get up as I come along, and, knowing my companion, reply civilly enough to his inquiries, since they think he may have business to transact there, and that somebody is wanted; for he is a police sergeant, and has been so long attached to the district that his portly figure and round, rosy, good-humoured face are known to most of the people even in Tiger Bay, so that he is treated with as much respect as the nature of the tigers will allow. These girls sitting here get up quickly, and, pushing open the street-door, invite us to enter with a mocking assumption of welcome. "Oh, no, the door's not shut," they answer in reply to inquiry; will we walk in? "for the room door ain't shut neither;" a statement proved by their opening one on the right, near the stairs, and desiring us to come in and not to be afraid.

It is evident that they consider this a good joke, by their giggling amongst themselves, and one of them precedes us into the apartment, where a couple of flaring tallow candles reveal a stout middle-aged woman lying in bed. There are still some remains of a past beauty in her bloated face, and in the long black hair, which is streaming over the pillow; it is evident too that she is the mistress

of the house, for her room is well furnished, and has a wonderfully snug, not to say luxurious, appearance. The girls who have admitted us seem to take a delight in ushering us in, especially as there seemed to be something suspicious in their all sitting on the stones outside while the lights shone within. But they were only crouching there, waiting wearily for such prey as might be drifted accidentally into the Bay. She inside had waited as long as it suited her; but, being secure of her miserable lodgers, and well knowing that the best of the pickings would come to her share at last, she has finished her nightly allowance of drink somewhat early, and now stares at us with dull drunken eyes, as she rolls her head on the pillow and inquires our business. There is something so humorous in this that our conductresses snuff the candles, that we may have a good view of the room; and as it dawns upon the proprietress that she is really in bed, and that we are in some sort unaccustomed visitors, she delivers it as her opinion that our presence there is a sanguinary insult, a remark which produces a subdued burst of merriment from the party outside—who seem glad of any incident to relieve the evening's monotony—but in which I can scarcely help concurring, even though she is half asleep again before we go out into the street.

More terrible in appearance are the purlieus of Tiger Bay than that place itself. On my way to the maze of foul courts and alleys, half-lighted, and with an odour which turns me sick, lying about Bluegate Fields and the neighbourhood, I am led through one long passage, so narrow that I can touch the houses on either side, and so dark that but for the click of a lock here and there, or a low whistle sounding from an open doorway, I should think the whole place deserted save by myself and my

guide, the steady tramp of whose boots can be heard just before me, even when he is invisible. By the time we are half way through I hear him speak in a low tone, and presently there comes out of the shades another officer, whose lantern turns a broad yellow glare upon the blackened house fronts, and, being shut up again, makes the darkness still more painful. To be alone in such a place at night would expose any one to the possibility of robbery and even of murder—by any determined and practised ruffian who might run the chance—almost before a cry could be heard. Out amongst the streets lying off from the Bay there is little more security, except from the fact that other officers appear suddenly here and there from remote corners, or from the dark patches of shadows under black archways, and beneath dead-walls.

It is the utter silence, and the impression of stealthy villany which is conveyed by the sound of an occasional voice, the sudden shutting of a window, the disappearance of two or three shadowy figures in a passage, or round a dim corner, the sudden coming upon a ghostly group sitting before a door, and hushing their low talk as we go by—it is each of these things, and all of them together, which, with the wretched houses, the dirty streets, and broken roadways, suggest the true nature of the place, and a danger far greater and more startling than mere uproarious violence and coarse debauchery.

There is much, and yet but little, to be seen here; colonies of Irish, hordes of Germans, burrowing in the wretched tenements and swarming from roof to basement, the children wallowing in dirt, and clothed in tatters, yet sometimes thriving as if in defiance of all those rules of hygiene which are held to be most essential. Common lodging-houses, whose owners curse and defy us beneath

their breath as they hear our steps in the passage, but who ultimately precede the officer up the creaking stairs, as he demands to see the rooms, in one of which he may find somebody for whom he has been looking. Rough lodgers, not directly amenable to the law, looking up from one of half a dozen beds in a room, salute us with maledictions so hearty as to leave no doubt of their sincerity. Anxious-looking faces, pretending to be innocently unconscious, peeping furtively from beneath the coverlids in fear lest the visit may be for them :—listless, worn-out, hopeless faces, neither knowing nor caring for anything, and past the fear of most things, yet summoning energy to damn us for leaving the door open ; a dozen houses, in which some modifications of all these may be seen, and where poverty and crime lie cheek by jowl, the pauper, the thief, and the convict, having their representatives under the same roof :—houses, where we have to find our own way up the rickety staircases, and into rooms where every corner has its tenant, often famished and fever stricken.

A cellar where four lascars roll their yellow and black eyes upon us as they glare silently at each other, and smoke from one bamboo pipe, each in turn making a mouth-piece of his fist, and so inhaling enough rank vapour to last him till his turn comes round again. The two wretched women who are cooking some rice at a scanty fire are English, but so degraded, even below the degradation of such a neighbourhood, that they answer only with ghastly grins and a cringing paucity of words which seems to be borrowed from their companions, and to indicate the relinquishment of their last claim to the recognition of their old associates. Rooms, where dark-skinned, snake-like Hindoos (beggars and tract-sellers by day) live with English and Irish women as their wives, and live, as it

would seem, not always so miserably as might be imagined.

Wretched rooms in the most wretched of all the houses, where yellow Chinese sit in the midst of filth upon a heap of rags or on a dislocated couch, the refuse of a neighbouring broker's shop, and stupefy themselves with opium, while their two or three wives quarrel or fight, or cook a modicum of rice and pork over the embers of a wretched fire, or themselves lie in blank indifference on the floor, overcome by the heavy fumes which are even more sickening than the foul air of the reeking hovels where Sin-Yang or How-Chi sit looking at intruders with an imbecile expression of surprise on their dirty gamboge faces, or blinking their black bead-eyes, like great mechanical toys or wax-work, unpleasantly resembling life, but still more unpleasantly reminding one of death. These are some of the things disclosed by that portion of thief London lying dockward; and as I turn again into the broad thoroughfare of Whitechapel I meet tigers and tigresses going homeward to their dens, bearing Jack with them, and roaring jocose execrations, fierce epithets, or customary oaths, by way of greeting. Soon, however, all is still again; the last illuminated gin-palace is closed for the night, the gas is turned off at the Effingham Saloon, and, except for an occasional cry, as of some drowning wretch, there will be till morning a deep calm even in Tiger Bay.

VIII.

WEASELS ASLEEP.

I HAD already seen something of that teeming neighbourhood lying between Field Lane and the boundary of the district known as the West End. I knew that the very day after my visit the colony of organ-grinders had, by some extraordinary chance, come under the inspection of an officer of health, who found it composed of a number of men huddled together in lodgings so crowded that as many as ten people had been known to sleep on a landing where the effluvium was sickening, and the condition of the whole place such as is commonly described by the epithet "beastly dirty." I had learned too, with genuine pleasure, that to alleviate the awful sum-total of misery and degradation, the male night-refuge in connection with the Field Lane Ragged Schools had, during twelve months, received 3234 strangers, of whom 711 had been provided for, and the others had left for work. That in the female refuge 2647 women had been sheltered, and many of these were from fifteen to twenty years of age. That altogether upwards of 10,000 persons had shared in the charity of the institution. That of these, 1695 had been taken from the streets, and had been placed by the committee in a position in which they could earn their own livelihood. And that the total receipts were £4182 12s. 8d., and expenditure £3739 11s. 11d.

I know too that in Fox Court, Gray's Inn Lane, once

the famous Thieves' Kitchen, in the days when thieves *had* kitchens,—has been for some time past opened as a school; that the superintendent and teachers, with a perseverance which must be almost dauntless, have striven until their work has become acceptable to a very large number of the poor, and none the less so that they really, as far as their limited funds will permit, provide for the temporal needs of the people in the district. That they visit the lodging-houses to give religious instruction; have organized a visiting and relief association; have regaled the parents of the children in the Hall of Gray's Inn with roast beef and plum pudding; have given a good supper to eighty-two men who have attended their meetings from the common lodging-houses; have had children's treats, lectures, concerts, and mother's meetings; and have instituted a penny bank and a free lending library. All this has been done by the earnest efforts of men and women who felt that the very magnitude of the evil against which they had to contend was a reason for their striving to reclaim ever so small a part of that domain where the law seems to have effected little, and the Gospel must still be carried with a living influence and sympathy, without which it is no Gospel, but the very brassiest of brazen sounds, the most unmeaning tinkling of cymbals.

Yes, I know that all these things have been done, and yet that the results, full of hope as they may be, are but as a single green twig upon a great blank wall.

The growth of one small school is too slow to cover such a black and frowning space, and more cuttings from the Tree of Life are wanted, with willing hands to plant them.

Some unwholesome examples of the influences of the neighbourhood are to be seen even in the main thorough-

fare of Holborn, for here, in a tavern, where the gas is full on, and the energies of the barmen are at their stretch to supply the demands for liquor, there is a remarkable assembly of thieves and prostitutes, alternating with a few casual customers, who have come in for a "glass of bitter," and are of course unconscious that it is a well-known member of the detective police force who is conversing so affably with a gentleman in the tightest of corduroys and the sleekest of heads, over a glass of whisky and water.

I have no business here, however, and my evening's excursion has nothing directly to do with the police. I have received, in fact, a general invitation from the landlord of a common lodging-house; and as I know he is always to be found at this particular time sitting in a sort of state to receive his customers, I determined to pay him a visit.

His house is reached by an archway leading to a narrow court where there is a great quarrel in progress, proceeding—as I am informed by an Irishman, who has evidently been laid up with a broken head, and now stands taking the air of the main street—from a lot of drunken people. This intimation having been given with a manner which would denote that my informant was innocent even of the smell of strong drink, I refrain from pursuing so painful a subject, but make the best of my way to a doorway on the right, where I am recognised by a young man, whose appearance is so different from that of the ordinary inhabitants of the locality, that I am at first doubtful whether I have not made his acquaintance elsewhere.

He is, in fact, dressed in black, and wears a scarf confined by a neat pin, and an unobtrusive silk watchguard; a white apron over all, gives him the appearance of a barmen at a respectable tavern—a resemblance made all the more striking by his having taken off his coat and rolled

up a pair of very clean shirt sleeves, nearly as high as his elbows. He is, in fact, no other than the general foreman or manager of the two houses, one of which I am about to enter, and where from eighty to a hundred beds are made up when business is pretty brisk. In answer to my inquiries, I am told that the proprietor (known here as the *guv'ner*, or more frequently as "the old man," "governor" having, after all, a disagreeable association) is at present not at all busy, and will be glad to see me, whereupon I walk into a dirty passage, and, finding myself in darkness before I have proceeded for half a dozen steps, I push open the first door that offers itself where I see signs of a light. As it happens, this is the room where the proprietor sits, if I may so speak, at the receipt of custom. It is a dim, fusty, frowsy back parlour, with a window which would look—if it were not too blind to look anywhere—upon a bare paved yard, with a sink in it. The proprietor's bedstead, a low "stump," of the regulation common-lodging-house size and pattern, occupies a long recess on one side, and is as confused a bedstead as it has ever been my lot to see, heaped as it is with a large variety of bed-clothes, not a little tumbled, as though they had served as a couch during the day for a series of individuals of very diverse tastes in their choice of position. Opposite this, on the other side, a long deal dresser, with a few shelves, is set out with two or three common articles of earthenware, some common knives, and certain small parcels and bundles appertaining to lodgers, who have left them in the proprietor's care. On sundry lines overhead hang proprietor's stockings, and some other small belongings of his, which appear to make a pretence of having been lately washed, and are now in process of becoming dirty again in the rather close atmosphere of a not very well savoured

room, in a remarkably ill-savoured neighbourhood. At a rickety table, and in a large, old, easy chair, which, to judge from its size, shape, and greasy leather covering, was superannuated when a hall porter of the last century took it with him into private life, sits the proprietor himself, whose general appearance is that of a highly respectable vestryman in his year-before-last's suit of clothes, and with a confirmed habit of going to bed without taking them off. There is something in the proprietor's manner so sagacious, and withal so full of a sort of experienced consideration, that he might be a sitting magistrate with a compassionate interest in a prisoner, or even an alderman with a philanthropic purpose, except that he is more deliberate than any magistrate of my acquaintance, and more intelligent than most London aldermen.

I am so reassured by the calm and dignified manner in which he desires me to "take a chair," that I am less startled than might have been expected when a large black cat makes a sudden spring on to my shoulder, and nearly causes me to overturn one of the two unsnuffed dips, in rusty iron candlesticks, by the light of which the proprietor is engaged in making entries of customers as they appear in a large, dingy, thumb-marked ledger, ruled with a money column, and containing the names of such lodgers as come night after night, and mostly occupy, a particular bed in some favorite room. The proprietor has heard of his establishment being mentioned even in print, in a police report, as a "thieves' kitchen"—a title which he holds to be altogether libellous; there is a kitchen there, as in all common lodging-houses, for the use of the customers, but he don't own that his customers are thieves, and don't know them to be thieves; "some of 'em," he is "quite certain, aint," and others, he

has no doubt, *are*, but he asks no questions, and he don't *want* thieves; if a thief goes there, he perhaps knows him, and them that he thinks are only just going wrong he talks to, and tries to persuade them to keep themselves right.

Does he ever give credit?

Well, yes; sometimes he does to his regular lodgers, or if he knows that a young fellow is hard-up he don't mind letting him come for a night or two, if he's well disposed and tries to get work; and as for thieves, he don't want 'em to come, and they know that he won't harbour 'em; nor, on the other hand, won't ask questions, and then he can't know nothing. As to the police, they got no information from him; he never has any to give 'em, and he's determined not to have anything to do with the police, and not to have *his* men made a show of, like wild beasts. The police shall learn nothing from him; what they want to know let them find out for themselves, for they'd, most of 'em, convict him or me of a robbery if they could, supposin' they couldn't get hold of the right person, that they might get the credit of convicting somebody. He knows 'em pretty well, and there ain't much to choose amongst 'em; no, nor magistrates and lawyers and the whole lot of 'em. There mayn't be false swearing, call it what you like, but they wag their jaws to a lie, swear they don't see black, because they won't look at anything but white.

Am I aware that some property very near there, and now devoted to a lodging-house, belonged to Lord Bacon? He was one of 'em. One of the greatest rascals that ever went unhung, he considers him.

As to literature, it's his opinion that Milton was the greatest poet for sublimity, and then Shakespeare and Byron.

Did he enter the name of his lodgers in that book?

Yes, such names as the regulars chose to give, or such as he knew 'em by they mostly put against the numbers of the rooms they occupied, so that there should be no mistake.

Some of the names chosen are either evidence of a peculiar taste on the part of those who chose them, or are highly illustrative, for I notice that the list includes "Dick Turpin," while some modest lodger, who is, I suppose, his companion, is satisfied to be recognised as "Dick Turpin's mate." Similarly, "Cock Sparrow" is followed by "Sparrow's mate," while "Oxford," "Jeweller," "Bos," "Countryman," "Rubbing-up Jack," "Rubbing-down Bill," "Coachman," and a few others, rely entirely upon their own attractions.

During the time that we are conversing the lodgers are coming in. Their chamber candlesticks have already been prepared in the shape of half inches of rushlight stuck upon small shards of broken crockery, of which ingenious adaptations there are perhaps forty on the table. It is comparatively early, and yet the larger number of the men and lads, as they come in, pay their threepence, and go off to bed at once, with a tired look which seems to disregard everything but sleep. Some of these have to be called at four and five o'clock in the morning; but others come and engage their beds and then go out again, or borrow a plate and take their supper with them into the kitchen, whither I shall presently follow them.

A man who has been driving a hearse, a stableman who leaves part of a harness in care of the proprietor, a plasterer, a couple of bricklayers, two or three whose occupation is not to be discovered from their appearance—one of them a shabby buttoned-up man with a hang-dog look, and another, an elderly man who looks as though he sold

books or pamphlets in the streets or at the bars of public-houses—one or two unmistakable young London thieves, and two boys who came in upon the introduction of a third, and stand laughing and kicking at each other in the passage until they come just within the door to pay their money; when proprietor “reckons ’em up,” (as he says,) at a look, and at once informs them that he won’t have any tricks, and that if they make a disturbance he shall “be with ’em, and throw ’em down stairs in half a minute.”

They are both thieves he tells me presently; not that he has ever seen them before, but he knows in a moment by the looks of ’em, and he should have told ’em so if I hadn’t been there, and have given ’em a talking to, which he has under present circumstances forborne out of regard to their feelings.

Another bricklayer, another plasterer, three wretched buttoned-up men of different ages, each in a lower stage of shabbiness than the last, and all more miserable in appearance than the labourers in their coarse grimy clothes; several hungry, anxious, pallid-looking youths, who are, I am assured, willing enough to work if they can get work to do, and have only occasionally gone wrong when it was that or starvation; a cab-driver and a lanky young fellow all begrimed with coal dust from head to foot, and with a short pipe in his mouth. This lodger is so astoundingly lively and wide awake in comparison with the other labourers who have come in, that he makes the place quite cheerful, and holds an argument with the proprietor and his foreman to prove that he was there on the previous night, which impression is corrected by reference to the book, where he is much astonished to discover that he figures under the denomination of Pot-boy, and delivers

an opinion that he must have been "tight" when he gave such a name as that, which probability is by no means denied, although the name is persisted in.

"You must get your beds very dirty," I remark, not, perhaps, unnaturally impressed with the appearance of this visitor.

"Well, you see, there's what we call clean dirt, and that doesn't so much matter; but, as a rule, the people that look most respectable—them that wear shabby clothes and seem cleanest outside, that is, without any rough dirt on 'em—are really the dirtiest; they're often swarming with vermin, and once or twice we've had a bed in a dreadful state after one of that sort."

"Do you often have people who have been in good circumstances, broken-down gentlemen or scholars, for instance?"

"Oh dear, yes; some that we know, and perhaps more that we don't know, as we never ask any questions, or very seldom. I've had a baronet; he was hard up, and went away to the hospital, where he died; and I've had a clergyman, brought down with drink, he was; and I've had two or three literary men, clever fellows one or two of 'em; but all for drink, and no respect hardly for themselves. It's mostly drink that does it with them."

Not desiring to bring the conversation to a personal issue, I professed myself anxious to "have a look over;" that proposition having already been made to me by my host, and to that end follow the foreman, who precedes me, up a flight of creaking stairs, with a flaring candle which barely serves to reveal the discoloured paint upon the walls, and the time-worn woodwork of the floors. I am bound to say that the apartment specially retained by the proprietor for his own use is by no means the best

example of cleanliness in the building, but at the same time it must be remembered that none of the other rooms contain any other furniture than beds and bedding.

The walls are for the most part covered with common paper hangings of light clean patterns, and both floors and staircases are evidently well swept and not unfrequently scrubbed, duties which, together with the bed-making, are performed by the foreman, with the assistance of another young man, who has, this evening, taken his turn out. In every room a printed notice is hung against the wall, stating the number of beds which are allowed to be occupied in that room, according to the requirements of the Act for regulating common lodging-houses, and the measurement of the Government Inspector. Assuredly not too much space is given to each sleeper; and although there would be perhaps sufficient ventilation if the windows were allowed to remain open at the top, such is the repugnance of the lodgers to cool air, that even in this stifling night, in a close neighbourhood, they carefully fasten up every aperture, and one irritable inmate exhorts us with imprecations not to leave that adjective door open. Two large dilapidated old tenements have been thrown into one, or rather united by a landing leading from one to the other, and by a communication between the back yards. Such repairs as are necessary have been effected, and have, I understand, cost a considerable sum; but every foot of space has been made available, and as there are rooms at all sorts of queer angles and up little supplementary flights of stairs, and at the end of unexpected passages, the effect to an unaccustomed visitor is a little confusing; especially as the general resemblance of the apartments to each other is not counteracted by any change of furniture. Some of the rooms, however, are larger than others—the

most commodious holding eight or ten beds, the smaller ones only four. The bedsteads are all of one barrack pattern, that of the cut-down wooden "stump," and the bedding consists of flock mattresses, coarse sheets, blankets, and rugs, but no pillows, a bolster answering the purpose. These articles are, in fact, mostly returned military stores and other cheap bedding, picked up at second-hand, "down The Lane," by which is meant Petticoat Lane, sometimes known by its more genteel name of Middlesex Street, where the Jew brokers deal in everything, from a surgeon's lancet to a saddle-back boiler ; or, from a child's old shoe to a diamond snuff-box. Up and down the stairs, which grow narrower as I ascend, and along passages where sometimes the boards bend beneath my tread, I am conducted to the topmost story, which is only reached by a high flight of new steps, steep as those of a ship's hold, and known to the lodgers as "Jacob's ladder." What can be the motive for some of the customers preferring the rooms to which this leads—as I am informed they do—is matter of conjecture ; but it is assuredly a place in which nobody would desire to find himself without a light, unless he had some strong reason for the preference.

I see no angels coming and going upon this ladder, which is named after that of the patriarch's dream, but I see many faces as I pass through the rooms where the lodgers are, some of them, already asleep. More than one, half-hidden by the bed-clothes, peer out keenly and with a look of wistful inquiry, which is not altogether free from anxious fear ; others stare with a dogged indifference ; others, again, are relaxed in sleep ; while one, which is deadly pale and lighted by blood-shot angry eyes, belongs to a man who is a confirmed drunkard, and, not having money to buy gin, drinks the naphtha-like spirits which he

uses in his work, mixed with a jug of water, which stands even now beside his bed. In almost every room faces, watchful, stupid, anxious, weary, dogged, aggressive, cunning, with each and every variety of expression, but with miserable poverty, if not crime, plainly visible in by far the larger number, look at me as I pass, or turn heavily round in sleep. In one room the single tenant, who is sitting up in bed making an ineffectual effort to turn his shirt, says in a drunken voice that he's not wanted, evidently associating my visit with the police, and immediately afterwards falls into the verse of a comic song, in the midst of which I leave him to darkness and himself. Down by another staircase into a large paved yard, of a dark and melancholy appearance, furnished with a shed where there is water and a sink, but no towel, since a former experiment in that direction led to the last one being stolen; down another short flight of stone steps (as loose and irregular as those of a cathedral turret), round a sharp corner, through a half-opened door, and I am in the kitchen.

A large stone-paved place, occupying the entire basement of one of the houses, its walls whitewashed, and its low ceiling crossed with beams. At the further end a large wide range, in which a good fire is burning, and on the hearth a tin pot, a gridiron, and a toasting-fork, for the convenience of those who have anything to cook, or desire to drink warm beer on this sultry night. Sitting on forms drawn up to the two or three rough deal tables, or taken to the wall for the greater convenience of leaning against it, such lodgers as have brought in food with them uncover it in a deliberate, secret manner, as though they objected to reveal its quality, and eat it in a stealthy way, which seems to impart a relish to it. Whatever it is, there

is but little of it ; and to-night, at least, the fire is but little used for culinary purposes. At the middle table a party is playing at all fours with a pack of greasy cards, and those who are not watching or disputing about the game either sit listlessly about the room, lounge on the forms, or speak together in muttered tones. Here and there are gathered three or four lads or men who seem to know each other, and occasionally a burst of laughter, a rough joke, or even the momentary excitement of a fight, will create a diversion ; but for the most part the lodgers are moody, listless, and somewhat suspicious in their bearing ; so much so, that it strikes me they are no better off in this respect than the politer society from which they are excluded, and that their reunions have a general resemblance to some other parties at which I have been present, inasmuch as everybody must feel bedtime a relief from the oppression of a simulated conviviality.

If any one thing is farthest from my thoughts at this moment than any other it is the sea, and yet I am presently making the voyage to China in a large trading ship, and have just stepped into the second mate's cabin. To be more circumstantial, I have turned round a corner of the great kitchen on my way out, and have been invited by my guide to look at his drawing-room. The place which he is pleased thus to designate is a place of some six feet square, which may formerly have been a large closet, and is so situated that, while it commands the entrance to the kitchen, it is out of sight, and, in a measure, out of sound of what is going on there. This, I learn, is where he sometimes sits during his nightly duty ; for it is his business to keep awake, and pretty wide awake too, till the earliest lodgers begin to stir abroad, a regulation not altogether unnecessary in an establishment where the

street-door is always open, and threepence down entitles any man or boy to tumble into the first unoccupied bed he happens to find in his way. To make a sort of bower, not in the horticultural, but the boudoir sense, in a little whitewashed closet at the corner of a common lodging-house kitchen, is, I make bold to say, a stroke of genius, which beats stage transformation scenes all to nothing; and yet here it is, as wonderfully suggestive a snuggerly as it has ever been my lot to visit. I'm not sure that there isn't a sofa in it; at all events there is some contrivance which looks like one, and there is a chair and a table, and a shelf of books, and another shelf of sea-shells, and a collection of stones and bright knickknacks, of very little value to anybody but the owner, but God only knows of how much value to him; and coloured pictures, and prints and gay engravings from our old friend the 'Illustrated News'; and a flute, or I am much mistaken, but certainly something in the shape of music peeping from behind one of the shelves and a score of odds and ends, which never could be catalogued even in a broker's inventory, to which fate heaven grant they may never approach.

There is something so delightful in the sudden revelation of such a place—it is so small, that we can't both sit down in it, and the atmosphere of the kitchen is at the present moment about equal to that of a small bakehouse when the batch is being drawn—that I almost lose myself for a moment in a sea-dream, minus a whiff or two of briny breeze; and determining to see no more that can destroy so pleasing an impression, call in upon the proprietor, who is still sitting in *his* bower under an umbrageous canopy of worsted stockings, and take my leave.

IX.

THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION.

HAVING learned from those interesting tables to be found in Blue Books that, notwithstanding all my observations in pauper-London, and notably in thief-London, the proportion of juvenile crime during the last year has shown a satisfactory decrease, when considered in relation to the increase of population and the statistics of adult criminality: that in England and Wales the commitments of offenders under 16 years of age were, in 1862, 8349, and last year the number had only increased to 8459, while in Scotland the returns present an actual diminution: there were in Scotland 1120 commitments in 1862, while in 1863 there were 1075: that on the whole of Great Britain there was an increase of less than 1 per cent., which is considerably below what the increase of the population would naturally produce: that there were 3677 boys and 1000 girls under detention in reformatories and industrial schools at the close of last year: that of this number 227 boys and 36 girls were out on licence; 9 boys and 4 girls in prison; and 85 boys and 14 girls absconded and not yet recovered—leaving the number actually in schools 3356 boys and 946 girls respectively, of whom 618 boys and 263 girls were in Catholic reformatories: that of the whole number, 2609 boys and 712 girls were under detention in England; and 724 boys and 257 girls in Scotland; and that the amount chargeable to the

Treasury in 1863 was, for reformatories £65,920 3s. 3d., and for industrial schools £13,117 5s. Having learned all this, but at the same time discovering that, after all, there were last year in England and Wales 5995 known thieves at large under 16 years of age, and 28,261 above that age, I am induced to visit the establishment where a very considerable number of those not at large, but who have been suddenly wanted by the police, are kept in durance for offences of various degrees, from a simple misdemeanour, such as wilfully breaking a window, to robbery with violence, or savage assaults, expiated with long imprisonment or hard labour.

My London prison is so short a distance from my London workhouse that I have to pass through the same street to arrive at both, and the neighbourhood scarcely changes, except at a short distance from the great gateway at Cold-bath Fields, where the whole district, for a short distance, is characterised by a forlorn unfinished appearance, as though an insolvent contractor had undertaken to build a parish, and, having utterly failed to abide by any original plan whatever, had left it uncompleted, an example of premature decay, which has remained an example long after the inhabitants have ceased to hope for any improvement.

It may be, however, that the building of the prison, and the consequent deterioration of the neighbourhood has, in many cases, reduced otherwise good houses to a degree of shabbiness which pervades all such neighbourhoods. Whether this be so or not I have no time to speculate, as my visit must be a short one, and I am standing at that great, grim, iron-studded gate, above which the stone coping bears the inscription "The House of Correction for the County of Middlesex." It is not, how-

ever, this grim inscription, or the tall stone pillars of the gate, surmounted on either side with the similitude of a set of enormous gyves, that would have so disagreeable an influence on the London thief, as the fact that inside the gates the hours of the day are devoted to constant work, and that the place is continually busy with the labour which, without much interval, occupies the prisoners during the time of their incarceration.

In answer to the bell a warder admits me to the gate-house, where I wait until I am consigned to the guidance of another officer in the prison uniform of blue cloth, his collar decorated with three metal sabres, and his military cap according very well with the sort of pouch which he carries at his side to contain his keys.

The prison of Coldbath Fields, the administration of which was once a disgrace to the country, and worse, if that is possible, than that which made old Newgate so notorious, may be said to have been the first penal establishment at which the silent system was enforced as a part of the regular discipline; this regulation having been instituted amongst the reforms by which Mr. Chesterton, the late governor, finally established decency and order, and eventually abolished the iniquitous system which had been so long pursued with impunity. The buildings and their accessories occupy some ten acres of ground, and from a bird's-eye view resemble one of those toy constructions, the separate parts of which are put together from a box, so that the ground plan may be altered at will. The original building was erected in 1794, on land purchased by the County Magistrates for £4350, and the building itself cost £65,656, the large outlay being in proportion, not so much to the size or convenience of the structure, as to the thick walls, numerous and massy doors and gates, and winding

passages, which were at that time deemed essential to a place for the punishment of criminals. In 1830, however, a considerable extension was necessary, and a "vagrants' ward" was added, while two years afterwards another ward was completed on the radiating system, at that time just in fashion.

Very recently another wing has been added, and as I walk through it, under the guidance of the officer, I observe that, in the construction of the cells and the appointment of the building, with its light iron galleries and staircases, it precisely resembles the latest examples of prison architecture at Pentonville, and in the latest portion of Newgate gaol. In the great entrance hall, which is supported by heavy pillars, a crowd of prisoners are moving hither and thither, as the working parties are going to duty, and, standing aside to let them pass, I observe on the wall a large square board which looks like some kind of calculating machine, but is in reality the prison register of occupied and unoccupied cells; the surface of the board being cut into small hollows, each hollow representing a cell, and each occupied cell so represented being filled by a neatly-fitting brass plate bearing the number of the prisoner corresponding to it; for here, as at other prisons, the inmates are known by their numbers, which are placed conspicuously enough on their backs, and in all probability not one of all the nineteen hundred inmates is ever addressed by name, except by his companions, when there is any opportunity of whispering. It is, perhaps, difficult to determine what amount of good may be effected by the Scripture texts, which are printed in large type, and hung up here and there against the walls, and especially in a place where a very strict supervision is sufficient to prevent at least the outward breach of the commandments; but

experience may have proved the wisdom of this kind of teaching. Inside the door of each cell these descriptive texts recur, printed under an appropriate heading on a paper which also contains morning and evening prayers, and the prison regulations. The cells are—cells, and that is all; many of them very dark, and, even when tolerably ventilated, exceedingly gloomy, although this depends upon the position they occupy in the galleries. The furniture consists simply of a square of sacking stretched across from wall to wall, to contain the flock mattress and bedding (some have a low iron cot), a wooden stool, two or three books on a deal shelf, and a gas-burner. The galleries or corridors so closely resemble those of certain “model lodging-houses” which I have visited, that I no longer wonder at the repugnance of many of the lower orders of people to occupy apartments in these excellently intended buildings. I would as soon think of living in such a building after my visit to the metropolitan prison as I would contemplate making arrangements for a gymnasium fitted with a private treadmill, or order of my tailor a suit of reddish-gray with a transverse violet stripe.

A number of men are employed in cleaning their cells and scrubbing the corridor, and a detachment of prisoners occupying one division of the building are exhibiting their bedding to the weekly inspection of the warder, whose duty it is to see that the mattresses and blankets are clean and free from vermin. In the older portion of the prison I notice that no proper arrangement has been made for either warming the cells or enabling the prisoners to communicate with the warder, who, as far as I can learn, might be altogether unconscious of his assistance being required, unless the inmate of the cell could shout loud enough to attract his attention. This, and the fact that

both corridors and cells are so dark that in those unprovided with gas, reading would be almost impossible, make the old prison a gloomy place enough ; but in the arrangements of the new wing much of this is altered, according to recent improvements in other gaols. Quite a different sort of inconvenience must belong to the dormitories, of which there are five. They are large and lofty rooms, with pointed barn-like roofs, supported by beams, the walls scrupulously whitened, and the floors scrubbed to the highest pitch. From end to end of these apartments stretch four stout iron rods, supported on stanchions about two feet from the floor and six feet from each other ; and to these are suspended, or rather stretched, similar strips of sacking to those used in the cells ; so that a treble row of beds, at a few inches' distance from each other, runs from end to end of the building, and a space is left for the passage of the warder, who sits all night by the fire-places, or in summer near the gas jets, which are so contrived as to form a stove for heating coffee or tea for the refreshment of the officers in charge. Here the men who are not in separate confinement come as soon as the day's work is over, and are allowed to sit on their beds and read until the gas is turned out from the burners, which stretch from a large T branch over the beds. The duty of the warder in charge must often be disagreeable enough, for even now that there are but half a dozen prisoners arranging the beds, the air seems somewhat close and stifled ; so that during the summer nights, when all the hammocks are occupied, there must, I fancy, be need of better ventilation than can be supplied by the long slits or holes above the tops of the windows.

The warder during night duty wears list slippers, and every precaution is taken to prevent communication

amongst the prisoners; but it is only reasonable to admit that amongst a hundred people asleep, or apparently asleep, in one large room, there is ample opportunity for whispered conversation. Here, as in other parts of the prison, the walls are hung with verses of Scripture, printed in large type, and alternating with the daily prayers and the regulations of the place.

For the use of the prisoners in each dormitory there is provided a lavatory, consisting of a long row of basins in a slate slab, over which the water is laid on. Those who occupy the cells, however, are obliged to make use of the sinks in the various yards, to which they proceed every morning in detachments, each man carrying his own towel, and—stripping down his collar at the word of command—afterwards making his toilet as best he may.

After threading the various corridors in this irregular series of buildings, which resemble a strange sort of garrison, surrounded on all sides by a high wall, I come upon the yards where the workshops are in full swing. Carpenters' workshops, where the whiz of saw and plane sounds cheerfully after the dread monotony of the cells; coopers' workshops, where tubs and casks are being set upon the frames and hoops are being driven in a workman-like manner; smiths' workshops, where the hammers clink upon the anvils beside the forges; wire-workers' shops and brushmakers' shops, where everybody is busily engaged; these are a part of the more recent discipline which has superseded the old useless labour to which the prisoners were once consigned almost without exception.

More busy still are the tailors and shoemakers, who occupy respectively each side of a vast room in an upper part of one of the buildings, where there is a powerful

odour of wax-ends and old and new cloth, rendered more pungent by the stoves at which the tailors' irons are being heated at both ends of the apartment. On low benches, or sitting cross-legged on boards about two feet from the ground, tailors and shoemakers are working as hard as though they were gaining an honest living outside the prison, making or mending the clothes and shoes for the officers and inmates of the place, as well as for those of the county gaols. Great baskets filled with boots in every stage of dilapidation, and heaps of garments sadly in need of repair, are placed near the elevated seats of the officers in charge of these two divisions of prison labour, and the instructors or foremen, in great leather aprons, or with that slipshod appearance which appertains to the trade of tailoring, move hither and thither to superintend the work. As I pass along the space which divides the room into two parts, I notice that every eye on my left hand rests with a half stolid, half critical expression upon my boots, and that simultaneously every eye on my right hand observes and appraises my trousers, which, being of a sea-going fashion, are noted with looks not a little quizzical, and in some cases contemptuous.

Here, as in all places where criminals are undergoing punishment, the prison dress and the closely cut hair, give an appearance of uniformity to the faces; but, apart from that, I am unable to detect a very great prevalence of brutality in their expression. Many countenances there are which exhibit the worst type of ruffianism, or the low cunning which belongs to the hardened thief; but, amidst so large a number, there are such degrees and differences of crime that no prevailing expression can be detected. Added to this, the prisoners at Coldbath Fields are not compelled to shave, unless they come in without

a.b a.

q.p q.p

d.b d.b

q.p q.p

d.b d.b

beards, when they are expected to continue the practice of appearing with clean faces. This regulation has been adopted, first, that the health of those wearing beards may not suffer by their being deprived of those ornaments, and, secondly, that they may be more readily identified. The prison dress of rough cloth, and the cap, which is similar in shape to those pinched-up paper caps worn by journeymen bakers and confectioners, fail to destroy so much of the individuality of these men as is affected by the closely shorn convicts condemned to penal servitude, although the only visible classification is that which assigns to the criminal prisoners a gray, and to those under punishment for "misdemeanour" a blue, uniform.

A large square lobby, in appearance like a wheelwright's shed, in which coils of rope occupy some high shelves, and where men, standing at wooden blocks, are cutting old cable into chunks with small hatchets, leads to the series of rooms in which the prisoners are engaged in that most common employment for vagrants or incorrigible paupers and convicted felons—picking oakum.

The hard pieces of junk are placed in a scale and weighed before being consigned to the basket in which they are conveyed to the oakum rooms, the quantity which each prisoner has to pick daily, varying according to his sentence, that is to say, whether it be to hard labour or only to common imprisonment; the former condemning him to pick from three to six pounds a day, in proportion to the hardness and tarriness of the junk, the latter to pick only two pounds a day. Notwithstanding that the carpenters', coopers', smiths', and other shops are busy, that the prison work in the way of plastering, painting, shoemaking, and tailoring, is done by convicts, and that the very tin porringers in which the food

is dispensed are made by the prison tinsmiths, oakum picking is the busiest employment in the place, since the demand for oakum is insatiable. It is a trade soon learnt, and requires but little space for its execution. There are three oakum rooms, one for those imprisoned for misdemeanour and two in the felons' prison, and in all of these the men sit about two feet apart, on low forms, each picker with a heap of junk cut in pieces of a few inches long beside him, and with a small iron hook strapped just above his knee. As each length of rope is taken from the heap it is untwisted into separate strands, which are rolled backward and forward on the knee, or rubbed briskly under the iron hook, after which the fibre is easily picked into a fluffy ball, which goes to the heap of oakum on the right hand of the operator.

As the prisoners sit in these large rooms, twisting, rolling, rubbing, until their soft, thievish fingers grow red and sore, and afterwards hard by their contact with those stiff chunks of tarry hemp, the expression is so varied that a careful observer might trace a whole theory of physiognomy by a half-hour's stay. Many of the prisoners return the gaze of the visitor with an impudent look of careless or mocking bravado, others scowl darkly as they bend over their work, and some go stolidly on without changing a muscle of their faces, for there are many here who spend half their lives in prison discipline, and who come back at almost regular intervals; there are even prisoners, who, beginning their experience of Coldbath Fields, as juvenile depredators, grow gray in the course which takes them there on periodical visits, so regular, that they seem to have established a claim to the protection of the establishment, and to regard it as a sort of school in which both juvenile and adult offenders are kept out of harm's

way, except during the holidays, which date from their discharge to their next committal. In the midst of these large rooms the warders on duty sit on elevated stools supporting frames which somewhat resemble portable reading-desks, and these officers watch keenly for any breach of discipline or an attempt at communication.

The scene is strangely monotonous, and, although the sheds are well ventilated, there is a closeness in the air which seems to be increased by the smell of the oakum and the fine hempen particles that are detached from the fibre by rubbing. I am surprised, however, to hear a confused sound of two or more voices as I enter, and at first think I have come upon some place devoted to instruction. I find, however, that two of the prisoners selected for the purpose—I suppose for their elocutionary ability and the strength of their lungs—are engaged in reading aloud, and for that purpose are seated on tall stools in such positions that each of them can command one half of the room.

Whatever effect this reading may have, it is not to be discovered in the faces of the listeners; and as the high tones of the readers are marked by very distinct pauses at the end of each sentence, and a rather too conscientious observance of the stops, the unaccustomed ear is conscious of what I can only call a sort of distinct confusion, and a general predomination of sound over sense, conditions which are inevitable from the fact that the voice of each reader penetrates beyond his own boundary, and as the subjects to which attention is directed are entirely different the prisoners occupying the seats midway between the readers must be subject to no little disadvantage, and are doubtless troubled by an embarrassment of intellectual riches, of which it is exceedingly difficult to take account.

I notice, too, that here, as well as in some other of the wards and workrooms, two or three men are under the hands of the prison barbers, who are shaving or hair-cutting in odd corners out of the way of the ordinary business. Indeed, this necessary economy of space, and the number of vocations which are frequently going on under the same roof, have already sufficed to impress me with a certain resemblance which the place now and then bears to the lower decks of a troop-ship, a fancy perhaps not altogether separate from the combined odour of tar, rope and flannel which pervades the air.

It is in the great oakum-room of the felons' prison, however, that the amount and variety of work is at high pressure. This building, which is some ninety feet long, is so large and lofty that it might well serve as a building for public meetings, while the large windows at the sides, as well as the skylights in the roof, afford plenty of light and ventilation even for the great assembly of labourers who are employed here. The middle of the room is occupied by some three hundred oakum-pickers, many of whom, together with the very wardens watching over them from their high seats, seem to be overcome with the heat of the weather and a sort of low, confused sound, the combination of a number of sounds, of themselves almost inaudible, like that of the drawing of a single strand of hemp over an iron hook. The work goes on, however, in a monotonous mechanical way, which is scarcely affected by the simultaneous efforts of three readers to control their own consciousness of the perpetual humming under-current which apparently makes their utterance as difficult as though they were addressing a noisy assembly or trying to read from beneath a blanket. I should be sorry, indeed, to know that this reading was about to be abolished,

as it must, under any circumstances, be a merciful relief from the dull, blank monotony of such work performed in unbroken silence through the weary hours of the day, but I am afraid that only a practised listener could learn to profit by it under the present conditions. "The savage people" shouts one reader, with a very muscular effort at distinct pronunciation, and a manner of dwelling on the words which reminds me of some popular preachers: "Came run-ning to-gether, and soon sur-roun-ded them." I suppose that he is reading the account of some missionary enterprise; but I have no time to speculate, as my attention is called to the commencement of a fresh sentence by the reader further on, who deliberately makes known to us with a rising inflection, but not without signs of weariness induced by a rather dry subject, that "*the* flour, as it is ground in these mills, is"—something from which my attention is attracted *by* the mill itself; not, perhaps, the mill of which the prisoner is reading, but the tread-mill, or, as it should be called, tread-wheel, which occupies one side of this room, and where some forty "hard-labour" felons are engaged in ascending a sort of revolving paddle-box,² commanding no view whatever, and the top of which they never reach.

The tread-wheel alternates with oakum picking in the case of prisoners consigned to hard labour, and there are four or five wheels in the prison; the one which is now before me being the largest. The tread-wheel, which was first brought into use at Brixton prison in 1817, is said to have been the invention of Mr. Cubitt, the engineer of Lowestoft, who, on being adjured by one of the magistrates of the county jail at Bury, to invent some mode of employing the idle prisoners, was suddenly struck with the notion of an elongated wheel, which re-

sulted in the invention of the machine that has been the terror of idle scoundrels ever since, and is generally known among them as "the mill."

The wheel, which is, in fact, a cylinder extending the whole length of the building, contains twenty-four steps, something like those used to mount a paddle-box; the circumference of this cylinder is sixteen feet, and the steps are eight inches apart, so that a revolution of the "wheel" includes twenty-four steps. At every thirtieth revolution, that is to say, every fifteen minutes, a bell connected with the machine, announces that the "spell" of work, which lasts a quarter of an hour, is finished, and on the days that a prisoner is set to work at the "mill," he completes fifteen of these spells, or nearly four hours of the hardest labour to which any human being need be subjected. There are three tiers or galleries in front of this wheel, where the prisoners can never mount the terrible steps which sink beneath the tread of each unhappy Sisyphus, as he holds with the ends of his fingers the ledge which extends at about the height of his shoulders. Each prisoner is divided from his neighbour by a wood-work screen, shaped like the end of a "box" in a coffee-room, and as their backs are presented to me, I learn what I had long suspected, that the human back is as expressive of character under some circumstances as the human face. It is easy to see, too, that experience will enable the prisoner at the tread-wheel to avoid the labour to which the novice is subject by his endeavours to mount the steps, instead of allowing them to come down to the proper level, and sliding his foot easily upon each in succession. I notice, too, that some of the unfortunates seek to rest the ankle by a change of position and place first one and then the other foot sideways upon the narrow step.

Whatever expedients they may adopt, however, there is no doubt that this at least is hard labour. If I ever had a doubt of it, that doubt is removed, as I see the men come down hot, panting, and bathed in perspiration, to sit on the benches at the bottom of the gallery; while others take their places in the vacant stalls to keep the relentless cylinder in motion. The amount of resistance of the wheel is regulated according to the number of men employed upon it, by a "governor" and a horizontal fan placed on a pedestal in the adjoining yard; but I am glad to learn that this exhausting labour is no longer useless, since it has been applied to the grinding of the prison flour, which is now pouring from the hopper in a neighbouring apartment, fitted like a mill, while the miller himself, with every appearance of that jollity proverbial to his calling, is sitting amidst his sacks reading a newspaper. Going once more to the wards in an upper story of one of the irregular blocks of building, I come to a sort of lobby set all awry at the top of a dark staircase, and find myself in a large bare ward, where some half dozen boys are engaged in scrubbing; while a great many other boys, some of them too young even to scrub, are sitting on the forms, which are at present the only furniture of the room, except the texts and rules which occupy their usual position on the walls, and are printed in the printing-room of the prison, where convicts are employed to supply not only these, but police bills and other work having reference to the administration of the law.

Amongst the boys who are assembled in this room there are doubtless many that are taken from the horde of lawless young Arabs who infest the streets and beg or steal, under the direction of those cadgers who own them either

by the right of parentage or the demand for a miserable lodging and a mouthful of coarse food ; but as I pass along the space left in front of the forms where they sit, I notice many an innocent-looking chubby face ; many an open, candid, child-like eye. I am, doubtless, looking just now at some who are placed here only for misdemeanour ; but I cannot help thinking that for such offences they should never have been sent here at all, mere children as they are, and I trust it is no confession of foolish weakness to own that I feel the tears start to my eyes, as I notice the little clear round faces of some, or the pale pinched looks of others, who can scarcely be old enough to estimate the consequences of evil-doing, and think of the thousands of children in happy homes, whose punishment for a greater, because less excusable fault, would be the deprivation of some luxury of which these little fellows have never even heard the name. When we think of the influence, mental and moral, which is exercised upon a child's mind by confinement in such a place ; of the taint placed thus early upon his young life ; of the causes which produce juvenile crime in this great city ; and of the barriers which the law, combined with the "respectability" of English manners, thus places against the hopes and efforts of even the *infant* who has "been in prison ;" it is surely not too much to say that not one of all these little ones should be consigned to such a fate, whatever may have been their fault.

It should have been impossible for me to look down this long double line of baby convicts, and *would* have been impossible, but that those who are so assiduous to assize every grain of anise, mint, and cummin, are less careful of the weightier matters of judgment and mercy ;—that while the great burdens of systems which are intended to punish, to reform, or to destroy, lie heavily on men's

shoulders, scarcely a preventive finger is raised to lift from the poor and needy the overbearing weight of misery and crime which crushes them;—that while priests and prelates dispute and divide upon the mysterious doctrines of Christianity, the people and their children hunger for the bread of that Christian life which is above all doctrines and all speculations—the theology which Christ himself taught, founded upon the Fatherhood of God; and the love which was made perfect by sacrifice.

The disciples who desired to call down fire from heaven upon those who did works in the name of their Master, and yet followed not with them, were subject to the Divine rebuke; the “orthodox” of every creed in our day would too often leave the poor and needy, the halt, the lame, and the blind, aye, even the “little children” whom the Master has called, to perish in want and suffering, in ignorance and neglect, rather than yield one jot or tittle of their pretentious claims to settle the belief of men, and dwarf an eternal truth to the narrow measurement of a mortal creed. There have been those who have thought that as all nations grow and culminate and afterwards decline, so England had nearly reached the climax of her power and prosperity; and others have believed that the hand of God has been visible in reducing the pride of people in direct chastisement of certain national sins. If I could adopt both opinions at this moment, they would be inseparable from the thought that here, in this juvenile ward of the great metropolitan prison, a cry went up to heaven in accusation of the greatest and wealthiest city of the world.

The ward in which these boys are sitting serves the purpose of school room as well as work room; the rooms devoted to the adults are called day rooms, and are apartments of

various sizes, entered from the yards of the separate wards, and furnished with narrow desks or tables of deal, and a few long forms. Here the men receive instruction and take their meals. Two or three uncomfortable-looking criminals are at this moment engaged in writing letters to their friends, and lean over the narrow strips of desks in one of these dimly lighted rooms, in all the difficulty of composing an epistle which will be carefully read by the governor before it is allowed to be sent to its destination.

On many of these tables there are placed well-worn Bibles and prayer-books, provided for the prisoners to read during their leisure, and therefore more available for those who are not committed to hard labour; but as it is now near dinner time, I notice that a rough and somewhat dilapidated wooden spoon, like a boy's thoroughly-seasoned "top-spoon," is placed beside the space marked out for each prisoner of this particular ward. These spaces are designated by chalk marks, or, in some instances, by pieces of string tied round the desk at intervals of about eighteen inches, and the number of each prisoner is also marked on the space in chalk, so that the men may proceed to their places without delay or confusion.

The laundry is a large room, occupied by an enormous mangle, a copper to match, several troughs, a small army of baskets, and a patent washing machine of peculiar construction, all that can be seen of which is a horizontal revolving copper disk set in a great round box, like a magnified ship's-compass without the needle and face. The yard adjoining this shed is used as a drying ground, and bears a depressing appearance from the presence of a number of black gibbets on which those clothes are hung to dry which are unsuitable for the hot closets. The suits which belong to the prisoners are taken from them on their

admission to the gaol, and after being tied in a bundle are, when necessary, fumigated by being placed in a hot oven, where a brazier of brimstone is burnt on a lower shelf. These clothes are of course returned to the prisoners previous to their discharge.

The washing of the prison is entirely performed by men, and is, next to the baking, the most important duty. The bake-house is, as may be supposed, of large dimensions, five ovens being employed to bake the enormous number of small brown loaves, each of which is of the weight prescribed for the particular meal it represents.

Like all prison kitchens, the culinary department at Coldbath Fields has nothing very remarkable about it, except its size, and with its great coppers heated by steam pipes from an immense black boiler, and containing gruel, soup, or meat and potatoes, looks not unlike the engine-house of a large factory, a resemblance not diminished by the huge wooden tubs with iron hoops and handles, which might be taken either for enormous fire buckets or small mash tubs. The attendants here include a clerk of the kitchen, who sits up at a wooden desk in a corner like a factory time-keeper, and has been incarcerated for certain mis-statements in some other accounts formerly under his control.

The dietary of Coldbath Fields Prison is for prisoners above sixteen years of age, whose term of imprisonment exceeds three months with hard labour: breakfast, $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread, 1 pint of cocoa; dinner, on four days of the week, $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread, 4 ozs. of cooked meat without bone, 8 oz. potatoes; and on three days of the week, 1 pint of soup instead of meat and vegetables; supper, $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread, 1 pint of gruel.

For those not at hard labour, whose term of imprison-

ment exceeds three months: breakfast, $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread, 1 pint of gruel; dinner, $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread, 4 ozs. meat, on three days in the week; 1 pint of soup on two days; and 1 pint of gruel on two days, each with the same quantity of bread; supper, $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread, and $\frac{1}{2}$ pint of gruel. Those of this class who work upon the tread-wheel, have an extra soup day.

Prisoners committed for a period of less than three months, but exceeding fourteen days, receive the same rations as the above, with the substitution of a gruel for a meat day.

Those whose imprisonment lasts no longer than fourteen days, have $6\frac{2}{3}$ ozs. of bread at each meal, with one pint of gruel at breakfast, 1 pint at dinner, and $\frac{1}{2}$ a pint at supper, a diet which is generally efficacious in reducing the most bloated and turbulent evil-doer to a less antagonistic frame, both of body and mind.

When it is remembered that the work is both arduous and constant, that "hard labour" is no misuse of terms, and that ordinary employment is more exigent work than any London thief would willingly submit to, it may be believed that the diet of the prison in Coldbath Fields is at least not luxurious, and that during the whole term of the convict's stay there, he is under real punishment, apart from the dark cell, mere bread and water, the crank and the whipping post, all of which are ready for operation in cases of turbulence, assault, or refractory conduct; just as the wooden horse and the birch are amongst the things to be seen near the ward devoted to those poor little fellows whose case I have so lately been lamenting.

In looking at the dietary tables, it is scarcely matter of surprise that the stronger thieves should prefer the longer term of imprisonment, or that the London ruffian

should frequently look forward to penal servitude with more complacency than to a long imprisonment in this house of very severe punishment if not of correction.

If the quantity of the food at the various meals is not more than sufficient, whatever deficiency there may be, is certainly not compensated by the manner in which it is dispensed to the prisoners. The large wooden tubs with side-handles of iron, to which I have already referred, are numbered according to the wards to which they belong, and in these the soup, or gruel, is carried to the day-rooms, where the men, who have entered in single file and sat down each in front of his wooden-spoon, receive their allowance in a tin-pannikin. This wooden-spoon, tin-pannikin, and the regulation loaf, are the only implements provided for them at any meal; the victuals are provided to support nature, not to induce luxury, and as neither knife, fork, nor plate is at their disposal, the diners have but to listen to the grace before meat, and despatch their food in the best way they can. It may strike the visitor as not a little singular that those prisoners whose light offences have only consigned them to a fortnight's duration, should, in the one particular which, in gaol-life, forms the chief distinction between good and evil, have to bear comparatively the heaviest punishment. That for small misdeeds, and frequently for acts which are misdeeds only in the eye of the law, and are inevitable from misfortune, a number of unhappy creatures should be half-starved on the modicum of bread and gruel which forms their only food for a fortnight, seems scarcely consistent with the tenderness which is often displayed by the law to the most hardened criminal, and is certainly misplaced in a community where to *have* no settled place of abode is a misdemeanour, and to be a houseless vagrant seeking

shelter may be equivalent to committal as a "suspicious character," lurking about for an unlawful purpose. I think of these things as I stand here, and with every respect for the police force as a body, I cannot forget that some of their number, new to the service it may be, have a wonderful faculty not only of discovery but of invention to support, before a magistrate, any mistake they may happen to have made. I remember, too, that at this very time a question has just been asked in the House of Commons respecting a police-officer of whom a London magistrate declared that he would not believe him on his oath, that no satisfactory answer has been given (or at least publicly given) to that question, and that the Member who asked it was informed that the officer remained in the force, while it was not thought necessary to make any application to the magistrate inquiring the meaning of his assertion. So strongly am I impressed with these reflections that even the sight of some men with one or two stars upon their right sleeves fails to rouse my interest, although I learn that each of these stars entitles the wearer to half a crown on the day of his discharge as a gratuity for good conduct. I have already been made aware with the fact that the best conducted men in all prisons are generally the old offenders, who, having previously made acquaintance with the discipline, see their advantage in keeping the rules. My visit has lasted so long that I have barely time to see the chapel, and, in truth, there is not much to see, except a building which occupies a space over the entrance lobby, and is shaped like a fan, the smaller end or pivot being occupied by a sort of raised platform, where a plain desk serves as a pulpit, and a chair is provided for the governor of the prison.

The larger end of the building is divided into three

portions by great timber partitions extending almost from floor to ceiling; and in each of these, both in gallery and basement, the prisoners sit upon rude benches, the front row being separated from the body of the chapel below the pulpit, by heavy spiked iron railings, which give each division the appearance of a sort of great den or cage, and the chapel an empty menagerie, with a bare orchestra at a convenient angle.

X.

THE GAOL OF NEWGATE.

NEWGATE GAOL occupies a considerable portion of one side of the thoroughfare known as the Old Bailey. Grim and soot-blackened, its massy stone walls stare blankly at the establishment of the Sunday School Union opposite, at the five or six flaring, dirty taverns, and at the one or two dingy coffee-shops, where seedy men, draggled women, impenetrable policemen, and irritable witnesses or prosecutors while away the dreary hours spent in waiting for the calling on of the cases in the criminal courts.

To one or other of these taverns, policemen, officers of the court, friends of prisoners, and hawkers of nuts and small wares, repair during the sessions at the Old Bailey, and here, tired prosecutors who are kept waiting for their cases to be called, are compelled to seek refreshment from the stifling atmosphere of the courts. It may sometimes happen that an Old Bailey official in rusty serge gown, and with dishevelled hair, will rush wildly across for a dram at the expense of some hopeful witness, who is informed that his case may be put forward on the list in return for judicious liberality in the matter of brandy and water, but everybody hanging about the dirty bar, or seeking repose in the long close room, where a woman is busy frying sausages, comes at last to have a faded, jaded, drooping appearance, as if he had been up all night. The hard Windsor chairs and beer-stained tables

provided for the public accommodation, always bear the marks of yesterday's occupants of these dingy rooms. Even the seller of nuts, who endeavours to enliven the proceedings by a little gambling, becomes listless; and talks to some casual acquaintance, with a furtive look now and then at the celebrated detective officer, who bites the top of a stumpy cedar pencil, and makes a pretence of consulting his note-book for amusement. Such slight jocularities as he may bestow upon the frier of sausages seem strangely out of place amidst the general weariness, and the Newgate blight hangs heavily in the air.

Standing opposite and looking at the relentless stonework, there is but one light spot in the whole expanse from the dead wall at the corner of Newgate Street to the last gate entrance to the courts where the sessions are being held. This one spot is the governor's house, which intercepts the solid masonry, and, falling back a step, shows a range of bright windows and a shining brass plate upon a narrow door. Even this, however, is accessible only by a flight of stone steps, its entrance being barred (as not altogether disclaiming prison associations) by a railing of iron. But this door, and, indeed, the whole space occupied by the official residence, is utterly superseded and extinguished into gloom by another door, which is in itself the very type of all those dread recollections that make the very name of Newgate significant of terror and vain remorse. It is a small, black, iron-studded, door, this; black, as with the dead blackness of dirty crape, low and narrow as the entrance to a vaulted grave, ascended by a ragged step, the dust on which lies untrodden. In hideous mockery of ornament, this ghastly portal is surmounted by a set of gyves and chains, which hang in a square niche, and look like the remains of some human skeleton

kept there in its death fetters as a horrible warning to scare the gaol-birds yet at large.

From out this gloomy gate many a trembling wretch has walked as from a living tomb to meet a shameful and a terrible death; many a blatant villain has played the bully to the last and stared with bold and bloodshot eyes at the crowd who had come, full of greedy interest, to see him hanged.

On the heavy, corrugated stonework of the surrounding wall are holes, and clefts, and notches, where the workman's hammer has left its mark and the ends of beams have rested. Each notch and crevice might represent a human life, and yet the dark records of the hangman's office be but scarce begun.

But, with all its tainted atmosphere and sickening details of crime and suffering, the present history of Newgate bears in either but little proportion to the past. The interior economy of the prison itself has undergone a change scarcely more salutary than have the laws which tenant the building with the erring and the guilty.

Having obtained the necessary credentials, I present myself before the darkly frowning prison entrance and, ascending the high flight of stone steps, peep between the long iron spikes and look into the lobby, before I ring the bell by the long iron handle which hangs beside the gate. Once admitted, not without a caution amounting to habitual suspicion on the part of the officer who attends to the gate, I have leisure to observe that the prison-like elements of the building are evident even at this early stage of my progress, for there before me, to the right, is another black door, or *grille*, looking, with its massy bars of trellis-work, like a fearsome window through which no ray of genial sunshine ever entered.

The first thought of Newgate is associated, of course, with Jack Sheppard, and impresses me with the difficulty which I remember beset him on his attempting to escape ; that is to say, the uncertainty of his finding his way through the winding passages. This particular feature is still preserved in the building, and, indeed, many of the corridors and lobbies remain entirely unaltered in their gloomy strength and dark intricacy. Following my guide, however, I stop for a moment before a glazed room (like an unwholesome frame for forcing the ill weeds of crime) in which prisoners before their trial hold conference with their legal advisers, under the surveillance of an officer. Beyond this, and looking into one of the yards, is a partition of iron bars closely intertwined with a network of twisted wire ; at a distance of about three feet from this are more upright iron bars, behind which, in the yard, the prisoners stand to talk to their friends, who speak to them through the trellis-work in the lobby, so that they are separated in such a manner that no other than verbal communications are possible, especially as an officer walks up and down in the intermediate space. Very strange and melancholy it is to see a place like a doubly secured cage for wild beasts by which it is necessary for these unfortunate wretches to be separated from their fellows lest they should attempt some further breach of the law. Strange and terrible it must be, too, for the wrongfully accused. Who does not remember Kit Nubbles, and his agony of grief, when he is visited by his mother and little Jacob ?

With some desire to follow as closely as may be, the route by which a prisoner first brought to Newgate reaches the various stages in that awful journey from arrest to conviction, I pass on towards the main body of the building.

From these winding and gloomy passages I enter a hall of great area—light, warm, and clean—in the centre of which two staircases, like those that lead to the passengers' cabins in an Atlantic steamer, communicate with the basement. The place reminds me at once either of a large wholesale warehouse before the wares are brought in or of a new railway hotel, where the proprietors have retained the old arrangement of the bedrooms in corridors surrounding a central space. There are four of these corridors of light-looking ironwork, approached by staircases of the same construction, and resembling those same old hotels, inasmuch as there are numbered doors at regular intervals, which only require the boots and hot water outside to give the place an air of comfort superior to that of many a mouldy old inn in the City. There are no windows, however; and no boots stand outside ready for the inmates; while, instead of the central area being open to the sky, the entire building is roofed and lighted from a lofty ceiling. These numbered doors are the prisoners' cells; but, in pursuance of my original intention, I have to descend an iron staircase and follow the course taken by the culprit during his temporary confinement in the gaol.

In the basement there are two large but not very light rooms, each containing an ample bath and means for washing. To this the prisoner is first consigned until he has been thoroughly cleansed, while his clothes are submitted to a similar process in another apartment, and afterwards dried in a hot-air closet. This completed, he has his hair cut (not very closely, however), is shaved, if he needs shaving, and appears in the prison dress. It is astonishing how these regulations and the greyish-brown jacket and trousers seem to obliterate the identity of the

prisoners to a casual observer. The man who, with full, drooping whiskers and fashionable attire, may even be of distinguished appearance outside, dwindles in Newgate to an uninteresting convict enough. Such of the prisoners as have held a superior station are only easily distinguishable from the rest when they are in the exercise-yard; there they are to be recognised by their manner of walking, which, in the more highly bred men, offers a marked contrast to the slouching gait of the common felon.

Prisoners before trial or during a remand are of course under somewhat less restraint than those who have been convicted, and unless there is absolute need, for the sake of the general cleanliness, are not compelled to wear the prison dress; they are permitted also to live at their own expense on food of their own choice, within certain limits, but are, of course, restricted in the matter of drink, being allowed, in most cases, only a pint of malt liquor a day. In case of an unusual number of prisoners during the sessions those who await their trial are placed, with some degree of classification, to sleep in the now unused wards, formerly the ordinary sleeping or dining rooms of the old gaol; but care is taken that those who are selected for this liberty are only such as are confined for the less felonious class of offences, and there is little chance of a well-known thief or burglar being able either to corrupt others or to obtain hints by which to contrive further depredations.

The convict, however, is placed under the complete discipline, and, after his purification, a medical examination, and an interview with the chaplain, is conducted to a cell in one of the corridors, where he is generally set to work at picking oakum. These cells are entered by a stout, painted wooden door, in which an aperture about breast high is closed by a flap which opens downwards from the

outside, and forms a sort of shelf upon which food is passed in to the prisoner. This arrangement enables the gaoler to look into the cell at any moment without opening the door.

There are few attempts at escape now ; and, although there are no formidable arrangements of bars or iron-studded doors in this part of the prison, it is so regularly watched by the officers, who are constantly in attendance both night and day, that it would be futile to attempt to pass out of the corridor without an alarm, even if the cell-door could be opened.

Perhaps the most terrible thing about the aspect of the cell itself is its intense and hopeless cleanliness. Everything within it is so bare and spotless that no association of ideas can cling to it or serve to break its blank monotony. The flat walls are whitened so that the print of a thumbnail might be discovered on their unbroken surface. The light from the small high window falls upon nothing that will cast a fanciful shadow. The floor is of asphalte, never washed, but dry-rubbed ; firm, but almost noiseless to the tread. The furniture consists of a fixed copper basin for washing, over which stands a water tap, supplied from a separate cistern holding as many gallons of water as may suffice for all purposes of cleanliness and for drinking ; a small, square flap of white deal, fastened to the wall by hinges, supported by a movable bracket, and used as a table ; a three-legged wooden stool ; and a nest of three deal shelves. The prisoner sleeps in a hammock suspended from wall to wall by four hasps, and containing a bed and as many blankets as may be found necessary for comfort. Over the table is a gas jet, protected by a white-painted tin shade, but of course without a tap, the gas being turned on from outside. The hammock is slung before eight o'clock

at night, at which hour the gas is turned out; and at six o'clock in the morning the prisoner cleans out his cell, the bedding is taken down, folded in regular order, so that it may be inspected at a glance, and packed on the top shelf. The lower shelves contain the tin porringer holding about a quart, a tin plate, a spoon, and a tin knife—sharp iron instruments being forbidden, not so much on account of their being used in any endeavour to escape, but to guard against any momentary temptation to self-injury in that excess of excitement and misery which frequently supervenes immediately after conviction. In one corner of the lower shelf is a Bible, a prayer-book, and some volume for general reading which is supplied from the prison library, and may be changed every day if the prisoner should desire it. It is pleasant to see a volume of a well-known magazine, cheerfully wholesome and amusing in its character, lying there; and indeed this is a merciful—nay, only a just—arrangement, when we count the weary hours in which the evildoer is left to wait sitting at his work for the coming of the gaoler who brings his food. The separation of the prisoners is entire, the lock being turned upon them in their cells for the whole day, except during the two hours' exercise in the yard and the three quarters of an hour spent at chapel.

The chapel itself is as gloomy-looking a place of worship as can be seen anywhere away from the old underground vaults beneath Canterbury Cathedral, and there is the same air of secrecy and suppression pervading it. It occurs to me, even on this week day, with the sun shining outside the walls, that I might have come here to attend some proscribed funeral ceremony, and am brought here in custody by the way of the dark and narrow staircase. The pulpit is of plain dark wood, and the communion-table and

rails, which stand opposite the pulpit, are black, and evidently but seldom used; a short flight of steps on each side leads to two large galleries screened almost to the ceiling, one of them being occupied by male, the other by female prisoners. About half a dozen seats in the body of the chapel, not unlike the ordinary free seats in churches, are occupied by some of the less secluded prisoners, while a plain Windsor chair, on the right of the pulpit, and almost beneath it, is assigned to those who are sentenced to death. It is a strange and depressing place this chapel of Newgate, awfully solemn when we think of those who compose the congregation—but black, and bare, and dull in itself, suggesting little else than a spiritless hope that its influences may be more stirring when it is peopled even with prison life. And yet, as day by day the unwearied preacher strives to bring his hearers to repentance, and speaks of a spiritual freedom which shall give liberty to the captive soul, there may be—doubtless are—subtle workings and strong, unspoken agonies of supplication behind those impenetrable screens which may bear good fruit in time. So the sun's rays, struggling through the windows and touching the dull sordid benches, and the blank, unpromising furniture with a golden glory, may be but a type of what is effected there, unknown, perhaps, to him who preaches, but not the less a blessing and an eternal good. While at chapel the prisoners are guarded and constantly overlooked by several officers, and, of course, all attempts to speak to each other are instantly repressed, and, if persisted in, punished. The same regulation is observed in the exercise yards, so that the confinement is only less severe than the solitary system. Indeed, it would seem unbearable were it not to be taken into account that Newgate is only a gaol of detention from which the con-

victed prisoners are removed to the houses of correction or other penal establishments, and that their stay seldom or never exceeds five weeks, and is generally for a shorter period. It may easily be imagined how great may be the influence of the gaolers in occasionally entering the cells and evincing some human sympathy with their wretched inmates. There is reason to believe that this opportunity is mercifully exercised.

The punishment for unruly prisoners who, after being warned, persist in repeating their offence, is bread and water for a day; or, in refractory cases, the dark cell. These dark cells are situated in the basement, and are the very abodes of blackness—not of dirt and foulness, for they are clean enough and contain a traylike bedstead and a bed, but of darkness which may be felt.

They open out of a stone room like a cellar, where I see a stone-deaf prisoner chopping wood by gaslight. The doors (for there are two) are about a foot apart; and that which renders the darkness more terrible and oppressive is that not a sound made by the prisoner can be heard outside, and that he is acquainted with this fact. A few minutes, during which I suffer myself to be incarcerated in this cell, convince me that only the most dogged and brute-like prisoners can submit for any length of time to this punishment. I remember that a popular writer, in describing a similar place, represents a highly educated man as arguing from his own experience after voluntary imprisonment, that if he, with all the resources of learning and memory, found it so terrible, it must be much more terrible for the man who had no such resources. I am of opinion that this is not altogether conclusive, since it is the man of active brain and keen susceptibilities who would feel the punishment to be the greatest torment. My own sensa-

tions were, first, the utter blankness of everything, including my own identity; then an intolerable feeling that one might lose count of time, be forgotten, and yet never lose a horrible consciousness. A few hours are frequently enough to bring a stubborn rebel to submission, but the punishment is continued until there is reason to believe that this effect is produced. Every half hour or so the captive is, not inspected, perhaps, for he is invisible from the outside, but listened for through an opening till he yields, and the governor gives permission to restore him to the light.

The exercise-yards are situated at various points outside the building, and enclosed between it and the high external walls, some of which, in the older portion, are guarded by enormous iron spikes trenching downwards like barbs, and bristling in all directions.

In the old time these yards were scenes of profanity, obscenity, and wild riot, which it seemed impossible to check, much more to control. Now they are quiet enough, since, as each detachment of prisoners go out for exercise, they walk apart from each other and under constant surveillance. In one or two of the yards which are near the passages to the prison entrance the prisoners' friends come to speak with them, but they are separated from them by a double row of iron bars some three feet apart. Occasionally, as in the case of condemned criminals or reprieved prisoners, they exercise alone.

These yards mostly occupy the older portions of the area of the gaol, and adjoin the long wards already mentioned. On the stone staircases leading from these to the building are to be seen certain round iron plates, hanging by pivots to the wall at regular distances, and looking like the tin coverings of peepshow spy-glasses. In effect

they were the coverings of ancient and terrible spy-holes, through which a show was to be seen which will never be exhibited more. They were the points at which the gaolers of Old Newgate looked into the dark and filthy wards to note the riots of the ruffians who were confined there. Not unfrequently some brutal sentinel would, in his turn, watch for the appearance of an eye at one of these holes, which widen into a square aperture on the room-side, and make a dart at it with a burnt stick or some sharp weapon amidst a yell of groans and curses. Near these yards, too, are the old well-holes, now used as air-shafts for ventilating the lower passages and staircases, and one of the yards leads to the condemned cell.

Apart from the awful reflections with which they are associated, there is little in the condemned cells to excite the imagination; they are simply two ordinarily sized cells knocked into one, with the substitution of a low wooden bedstead for the usual hammock. The increased size is necessary from the fact that three people occupy the space together—the prisoner and two officers, who watch him day and night until the dreadful end.

I am led to inquire of my thoughtful guide whether, in his opinion, the fear of capital punishment does deter any who may be prisoners in Newgate from the commission of murder; and learn, as part of his own experience, that convicts who have been brought back from distant penal settlements in the old time for assaults on their officers have acknowledged that they would have completed their murderous work if they had not been certain of hanging.

In one or two of these cases there seemed to be little remorse for their misdeeds. They conceived that their lives were made a torture by the warders, and that but for

the gallows they could be in no worse condition by committing a fresh crime.

Returning to the main building and the lightsome iron corridors, we see one of the prisoners bearing a large square wooden tray, on which is arranged about a dozen porringers of soup, and as many thick slices of bread; this is placed upon a lift, which raises it to the first, second, or third story, as may be required, and the gaolers then take the porringer and a slice of bread and pass them in to each prisoner through the trap in his cell. The dietary scale is—for breakfast, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of bread and a pint of gruel; for dinner, on four days in the week, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of bread, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of potatoes, and 3 oz. of beef; and on the other three days, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of bread and a pint of soup containing 3 oz. of beef; supper, the same as breakfast. The prisoners seldom require more food, but frequently feel the loss of the tobacco and beer to which they have been accustomed. Every precaution is used for keeping the inmates of Newgate in health and physical comfort, and the cells are each provided with gratings in the wall, for the respective purposes of drawing off the foul atmosphere and supplying its place either with fresh or warm air, as may be required. In cases of sickness, arising either from mental or physical causes, the prisoner is removed to the infirmary, a long room like a shabby workhouse ward, in another part of the building. Here he is allowed to talk to the other inmates, if there are any, and is placed under medical care and altered diet.

For any moderately sufficient reason, the prisoners are allowed to see the governor on expressing their desire to do so; and they can at any time summon one of the gaolers by pulling a handle which hangs in their cell and communicates with a large bell outside, whose alarum

is sufficient to rouse the whole corridor. Lest some of the unruly might ring this bell for their own amusement, however, the ringer is at once identified by a simple contrivance, in the shape of a tin plate, painted with the number of the cell, which, ordinarily lying flat against the wall by the side of their door, is acted upon by a spring released on pulling the bell, and immediately starts out like a semaphore hand to point out the spot from which the summons proceeds.

One common trick of the prisoners in Newgate is to save a few spoonfuls of their gruel, and, after diluting it from the water tap, to ring for the governor, in order to complain of the bad quality of the food. I learn that this is counteracted by a sample of each day's boiling being kept in reserve, in order to offer a practical contradiction to such ingenious charges, and that many of the prisoners are aware of this arrangement.

The female side of Newgate resembles the male side in almost every particular, with the addition of a commodious laundry, in which there are stalls, fitted up with sinks, washing-trays, &c., and a row of gigantic coppers, a patent wringing-machine, a great expanse of deal table for folding, and a series of hot-air drying-closets.

But little now remains to be seen, and the final localities are full of associations too terrible to dwell upon. They are the last scenes upon which the condemned felon looks before he leaves that low black door to die before the walls of Newgate.

Whence comes the instinctive shiver which creeps over me as I turn in a hitherto untraversed stone passage and emerge into this long dank alley, with the door at the further end leading to the law courts? It is a squalid but yet an awful place, this alley; shut in by the high and

gloomy walls which seem to moult away their unhealthy surfaces on each side;—paved with uneven flagstones, roofed by heavy iron bars set in the walls on each side, and between which the slow drizzling rain falls on the dingy stones with a heavy, melancholy splash.

In the wall, on the prison side, are letters roughly cut in the brickwork, at about four feet from the ground—single initials which may mean anything or nothing; they are fraught with awful meaning, however, as are those same irregularities in the flags, where some have sunk away from the rest and slope in contrary directions. I am standing on the graves of felons—murderers who, having been hanged, lie mouldering four feet beneath us, the occasional letter in the wall the only memorial save that in prison records—their name and crime remembered in the ‘Newgate Calendar;’ their bodies, still forfeited to the law, “buried within the precincts of the gaol.”

By this dreadful passage the miserable criminal goes up to the court for trial. A felon convicted and sentenced to death, settled to a dark sullen despair or writhing in an agony of terror, traverses it in his way back to the condemned cell, and so drags his half-palsied limbs over the place already destined to become his grave.

Retracing my steps towards the entrance lobby of the prison, I am led into a large apartment known as the “bread-room.” It resembles a big, bare kitchen, and is fitted with a square deal table and a wide, useful range. Upon this table the prison bread is cut and weighed. There is a small cupboard in this kitchen, where it seems probable (looking from the outside) there are kept a small stock of eatables or dinner requisites.

But when this door, somewhat to my surprise, is opened, it turns out to be a horrible pantry enough, for in it are

preserved, handcuffs and several pairs of the old fetters and heavy irons formerly used for criminals. All fetters are abolished in Newgate at the present day, and handcuffs are only used when the prisoners are removed to fulfil their term of penal servitude at other places; but here are the veritable fetters which confined Jack Sheppard—anklets joined by massy iron links, which can either be caught up in the middle between the knees and joined to the chains depending from the handcuffs, or fastened (as was usual) to a ringbolt in the floor of the cell. They weigh altogether 29 lb.; and a facsimile of those which confined Dick Turpin at York Gaol are of the enormous weight of 37 lb. In this ghastly closet, too, is the axe intended for beheading Thistlewood and the Cato Street conspirators, made for that purpose, but never used, as they were ignominiously hanged. Most terrible of all, here hang the straps, belt, and buckles, used to pinion the wretched convict on the morning of his execution. This “bread-room,” indeed, is part of his route to the gallows, and he is brought here to be prepared for death. Once more crossing the passage, I stand in the kitchen of Newgate, a common-place looking room, not unlike the furnace-room of a laboratory, as regards the large coppers; certainly not much like an ordinary kitchen, inasmuch as it contains none of the usual adjuncts to the preparation of food, since few culinary utensils are requisite for the ordinary meals. All speculation regarding the real use and ordinary duties of the place, however, are superseded by a revelation which seems, at the moment, truly horrible, and at the same time destroys a long illusion. That awful door, through whose black and narrow portal the wretch condemned to die passes to his tomb—that “dark, frowning, debtors’ door”—is none other than the door of the kitchen; and through this room, in which

a narrow lane is made by means of black drapery which hides the coppers and furnaces, the malefactor pinioned in the "bread-room" walks to death.

Scarcely staying longer than a minute in the ante-room, close to the lodge, where are kept the casts taken from the dead (though evidently not much distorted) faces, I turn to go ; for, slowly and painfully pondering these things, the air of Newgate clogs and stifles with a strange oppression. The figure, which, even in spite of an occasionally assumed bravado, is cowed with trembling horror, gasping till the shoulders work in spasms as it is led slowly onward ; the wild imploring tenacity of that final grasp of the gaoler's hand, which is held as though it were felt to be the last remaining spar upon which to keep a moment's hold of life before the final hurling into the awful, fathomless sea beyond ; the sickening moment, when the sheriffs recoil behind the drapery, holding their fingers in their ears to stop the sound of the sharp click of the bolt and the thud of the falling trap ; the swaying crowd rolling and surging in one awful wave of white upturned faces, all pass before me like an unearthly dream, till I find myself waiting at the grim, spiked door to be let out into the glimpse of sunshine and the morning air.

XI.

THE CONVICT IN PENAL SERVITUDE. MILLBANK.

“THE jury have found you both guilty, and you are each sentenced to seven years’ penal servitude.”

There has been a temporary hush in the loud whispering of barristers, in the swinging and rattling of doors, in the sharp shuffling of clump-soled feet upon the matting, as messengers and policemen passed in and out. The hot, close air of that hall of justice—the Criminal Court, in the Old Bailey—has been humming (in unaccustomed ears) as though the dance of death had been set to the bagpipes, with rather too much of the drone.

Now, however, the judge settles himself afresh; the jury shift into the position which they had occupied before the front row turned solemnly round to consult upon the verdict with the back row; the barristers employed on the next trial open their papers, arrange their gowns and bands, and lean over to speak to their attorneys; and that strange public which daily hangs about the law courts during the sessions nibbles another corner of dingy biscuit and prepares itself to listen to another case.

The two ruffians who just now occupied the dock have looked stolidly and blankly before them during the whole proceedings, except that once the dark-haired one, whose brows shelve over his eyes like a penthouse roof, suddenly contradicted a witness and so provoked a contemptuous

laugh from his companion. That companion's face has already caught the prison complexion, and looks, with its flat, heavy features, and stony immobility, not unlike one of those faces, executed in bad stucco, which may be noticed over certain old-fashioned street-doors.

It would be difficult to detect in it any sentiment of fear or remorse, any appeal against the sentence, any definite appearance of denial or pretence of virtuous assertion ; very little expression is to be discovered in either face except that of stolid indifference and defiance until they are removed from the dock ; and then, as they pass down the steps leading from the court, their features relax into a meaning smile, as who should say, " We know what this sort of thing is. Let society look out for itself when we have another chance."

They probably know enough about it to have learnt the slang name for that walled stone alley roofed in with iron lattice-work which leads from the Criminal Court to Newgate Gaol. It is pretty generally known amongst older ruffians as " Birdcage Walk," and a terrible walk it is. Some of the gaolbirds who pass over its stones on their way to the condemned-cells go back to it after death, for this is that " precinct of the gaol " which receives the bodies of those who are hanged outside the grim, black gate in the prison walls. Each of these uneven flag-stones covers a murderer's coffin ; above it the initial of the murderer's name may be seen rudely carved in the brickwork of the wall. The first step of the convicted criminal lies terribly near the last. There are dread sermons in the stones of that awful causeway ; but it is known as " Birdcage Walk."

From the moment of their conviction the prison life of the brace of felons who have just left the dock wears a somewhat different aspect. The steps which have led

them to Birdcage Walk began in a street robbery which, being resisted, was accompanied with brutal violence and the serious maiming of a policeman. After a night in the cell of a police station—which cell, as I remember to have said before, was the cleanest and best ventilated portion of the entire building—they were taken before a magistrate, who committed them for trial. Awaiting their sentence, they have for a few days occupied that anomalous position in Newgate prison which the law accords to the British subject who is popularly “supposed to be innocent until he is found guilty.”

Hitherto they have been permitted to see their friends through the iron bars and wire lattice which divide one of the prison passages ; might, if they had pleased, have consulted their solicitor in that glass room before referred to ; and could, if they had possessed the money, have obtained some addition to the prison fare. They have had opportunities for communicating with each other, and have been exempt from the regulation opium-picking of the gaol. The clothes in which they appeared at the Session House are their own ; but upon their first consignment to Newgate these clothes were subjected to a steam bath and so purified, while their wearers also underwent a cleansing process which is often in itself a punishment. Immediately after their return as convicted felons they exchange these corduroy and fustian garments for the coarse prison suit of grayish-brown cloth, and, being further transformed by shaven faces and closely cropped hair, lose at first sight such individuality as they possessed and attain a general resemblance to other prisoners, some of whom have been denuded of flowing locks and curled whiskers, and so reduced to the ordinary convict level, by which their features are left to the bare, blank

exposure which reveals all their good or evil points to the penetration of the physiognomist.

Only one of them can read well, and he cares little for reading except as a means of ingratiating himself with schoolmaster or chaplain. He of the beetling brows, who cannot spell, sleeps his spare time away until he speaks in chapel and becomes refractory, for which he is consigned to bread and water and the dark cell until the governor is convinced of his temporary penitence. It so happens that neither of the prisoners sees the other except for half a minute a day and at some distance until the order comes for their removal to the first stage of penal servitude.

Past the new Westminster Bridge, with its fine roadway, broad footpath, and low balustrade ; past Westminster Hall, and the spacious area where Richard Cœur de Lion waves defiance to the world on behalf of the British Constitution ; past the Houses of Parliament on the left, leaving the venerable Abbey on the right, I come suddenly upon narrow and dingy streets, with a quiet and general seediness in their appearance which impresses me with the belief that the inhabitants of that locality have little or nothing to do, and generally do it. Keeping the main thoroughfare, however, I reach the river bank by Horseferry Road, whence the black iron bridge of Vauxhall spans the dirty stream, and part of Lambeth Palace and the Bishop's Walk are visible on the opposite side.

Coming upon this locality on a somewhat murky day, the prospect is inconceivably gloomy, and the air which overhangs the river seems charged with smoke of many qualities which imparts a grayish-yellow look to every-

thing that is seen through its medium. On the Lambeth side the old archæpiscopal building, although strangely various in style, has something about it quaint and stately; but here, standing at Millbank, the enormous mass of brickwork to which the first attention is directed is low, dark, beetling, and full of depressing influences from its regular irregularity. The exterior entrance is far from imposing, since, as it consists of a lodge door and a great pair of yard gates, supplied with a very obvious and noisy bell, it is forcibly suggestive of a distillery combined with an extensive "horse depository." The building itself as seen from the roadway, not towering, but huddling, above the outer wall, has been aptly described in 'The Criminal Prisons of London' as "one of the most successful realisations, on a large scale, of the ugly in architecture, being an ungainly combination of the madhouse with the fortress style of building." It may be considered, however, that this immense structure is sufficiently elegant for its purpose, and that even the small embrasures containing the long lines of barred windows are quite suggestive of the use for which it was designed; for this is Millbank Prison, and the black, shiny police van which has but just left the yard has deposited my two ruffians in the establishment where criminals of their class commence their experience of penal servitude.

Millbank Prison may be said to be a general convict dépôt, from which the criminals are drafted to the public works or to other government gaols. It is, therefore, the largest prison in England, and the building, which was commenced in 1812, upon land purchased from the Marquis of Salisbury in 1799 for £12,000, is a modification of Jeremy Bentham's proposed "panoptikon," or inspection-house, which he declared might be so constructed

as to submit every prisoner to constant surveillance from a common centre. This will serve to explain the peculiarity of the ground-plan, which represents a sort of geometrical puzzle, consisting of six pentagons radiating from a large sexagon. So that viewed from a balloon, this gaol would look like a gigantic Pope Joan board; the "pool" or centre of which is occupied by the chapel, and the outgoing trays or pentagons, by the criminal fish and other objectionable "counters," which are in one sense so easy, and in another sense so difficult to lose in the social game. Each of these pentagons consists of three storeys, which are divided into wards, and contain the cells and "association rooms," where the prisoners are confined. The pentagons are divided between the male and female convicts, of each of whom there are above 500, sentenced for various offences and to different terms of imprisonment and penal servitude. They come to Millbank from all the prisons of detention, from the county gaols; in cases of military or naval offenders, from barracks or ships, where they are sentenced by court-martial, and occasionally from the government settlements of Portsmouth, Dartmoor, and Portland, whence they are returned to confinement for violence or dangerous misconduct. There is no classification with respect to the prisoners, and their punishment is all of a similar character until they are each drafted off to the various prisons to which the nature of their crime consigns them; so that while most of the inmates of Millbank are ultimately removed to the various metropolitan or suburban establishments, our two ruffians will in the course of their term of punishment be ordered to Pentonville Prison, to undergo probationary separate confinement; and, finally (as they are strong and able-bodied), to carry out their sentence at the government

works at Portland. If the ground-plan of the building at Millbank is a geometrical puzzle, the interior is assuredly an eccentric maze. Long, dark, and narrow corridors, and twisting passages, in which the visitor unaccustomed to the dubious twilight has to feel his way; double-locked doors opening at all sorts of queer angles, and leading sometimes into blind entries, and frequently to the stone staircases which, like the passages, seem as though they had been *cut out* of the solid brickwork, and that the few windows could only be put in when the excavation reached the surface. These staircases, so steep and narrow, are not unlike the devious steps by which the traveller reaches the towers of Strasbourg and some other cathedrals, except that they are even more gloomy. Two impressions are produced on the visitor as he cautiously follows the officer who conducts him through the winding entrances to the different wards: the impossibility of a prisoner's ready escape from such a maze, even should he contrive to quit his cell, or make a sudden "bolt" when going to or from exercise or chapel; and the almost equal difficulty of finding that prisoner if he chose to run the chance of hiding himself in the dark nooks or "doubling" in the zigzag corridors. This idea, however, is checked by the facility with which the officer himself unlocks door after door, and, by a strangely winding and irregular course, which seems almost subterranean, makes the circuit of the entire building.

It is probably this peculiar construction, as well as the sense of confinement produced by dark and narrow passages, which causes an apparent want of ventilation. The whole place has a prison atmosphere, while the want of free circulation and the consequent variation of temperature is so obvious as to suggest a tepid swimming-bath, in

which the supply of hot and cold water has not been properly mixed for immediate use.

The wards are passages some 50 feet long and about 10 feet high, one side of each of them being occupied by the cells, and the other side by the windows, which are at some distance from the ground, and, although the walls are roughly whitened, seem to give that uncertain light, which may be accounted for by their deep setting in the outer wall. In these wards my fanciful experience of the ill-prepared swimming-bath is confirmed, since in most of them, especially as it is a raw chilly day, the presence of the flues of the heating apparatus is very distinctly felt at certain points; while, as a great many of the prisoners are employed in tailoring, there are frequently two large closed stoves in each passage, for the purpose of heating the "geese" required for their work.

The labour of the convicts at Millbank is sufficient to constitute a very considerable manufactory, since in the various cells there are weavers at their looms making hammocks and bagging, beside the calico shirtings, the gingham handkerchiefs, and the linsey petticoats worn at the various penal establishments; shoemakers, who produce not only the boots and shoes for the prisoner and the officers of this and other prisons, but some work which finds a market outside the gaol; mat and rug makers, who use hemp and cocoa-nut fibre, and produce great numbers of doormats for wholesale dealers in the City, and, as I have just said, a little army of tailors. On the women's side there are seamstresses, to make shirts and women's clothes for the prisons, to knit woollen stockings for Portland and the other government stations, and to make brushes and brooms for the use of the gaol. Many of these are also employed in "slopwork" and common needlework

for the outfitters and wholesale tailors and hosiers—an employment which all too forcibly suggests “The Song of a Shirt,” and the starving needlewoman’s longing even for “the prison fare,” which is so much better than that which she can procure by unremitting and miserable toil.

Each cell is lighted by a window, and has a mechanical means of ventilation; and in each there is a gaslight adjusted, according to the work on which the prisoner is employed; those of the tailors and shoemakers being only two feet from the ground, while those where looms are erected are so contrived as to move on a jointed arm and come over the part where most light is required. The furniture of the cells consists of a tub for washing (which, being fitted with a wooden cover, is also used as a seat), a large earthenware pan, and a small deal table-flap, upon which may be seen, beside the tin pint mugs for cocoa and gruel, the salt-cellar, plate, and wooden spoon:—the Bible and Prayer-book, some school books, a slate and pencil, and probably some volume which each prisoner is allowed to receive once a fortnight from the prison library. The bedding and hammock are neatly folded into a square package, which looks like a large knapsack, and is placed in a particular corner of the cell; a comb and towel, and a broom for sweeping the floor, complete the list, with the exception of a flat wooden wand, the use of which will be presently explained. Some of the upper cells are provided with iron bedsteads instead of hammocks, but these are exceptional. At present, though by the new regulations instituted since the Commission of Inquiry, and the report of the Directors of Prisons issued in August of the present year, the hammocks will shortly be abolished for fixed wooden cots, with coir mattresses.

On the wall is hung a paper containing the printed regulations of the prison with regard to conduct, to the circumstances under which improved conditions and partial remission of sentence may be granted, and to the daily rations of food. In that part of the wall next the cell-door is an opening which, within the cell itself, commences with a square niche in the solid brick, the sides of which niche diminish till they form only a perpendicular slit which pierces the wall, so that a view of the cell can be gained from the outside, while the prisoner can see very little. Through this slit the thin wand of painted wood just mentioned, and which is red at one end and black at the other, is pushed by the prisoner, in order to call the attention of the warder when required. Each cell has two doors, the inner one of timber, the outer one composed of a stout and heavy iron grating. After two months' imprisonment, unless in the case of the prisoner's misconduct, the inner wooden door is left open from nine in the morning till five in the afternoon, so that the cells are moderately light and cheerful, and the visitors may, in passing, see their inmates at work. Some of them look up and shift uneasily as they notice a stranger with the warder; others go steadily on with their occupation, as though they had no regard for anything outside the grated door which divides them from the ward.

Beside the separate cells there are "association wards," where, as their name implies, a number of prisoners work and live together. In each of these there is one or more masters of the trades carried on there; and, although the men work together, they are strictly prohibited from holding any communication with each other, and are under constant surveillance all day, while it is the duty of the warders to

make their rounds every twenty minutes during the night. One of these rooms contains sixteen inmates, who work together, and at night sleep in hammocks, which are then slung from wall to wall, but during the day occupy shelves opposite each man's seat, and being rolled up, look like small casks in a spirit store.

The association-room devoted to tailoring contains the largest number of prisoners; that in which weaving is carried on of course requires more space for the erection of the looms.

Although the "silent-system" is "strictly enforced," it is impossible to prevent communication between the prisoners. In the chapel, the school-room, the association-rooms, and even in the exercise-yards, there must be opportunities for both signalling and speaking to each other. All that can be said is that it is not allowed, and that when a prisoner is detected in a breach of this rule it leads to punishment; either to a renewal of separate confinement, or, if he be refractory, to the dark cell and bread and water diet. Of other punishments at Millbank, handcuffs, and even whipping, have not been entirely abolished; and it is not unwise to retain them, since they are both found useful in cases of exceptional violence and brutality.

Some of the association-cells, I discover, are devoted to carpenters and coopers, who are employed in the workshops, and masons, or men who are employed in the outdoor work of the prison. Many of those employed in this way wear a rough blue dress instead of the regulation colour, which is rusty brown barred with a violet stripe. The outdoor and association work is, of course, less monotonous than that of the separate cells, and is a reward for good conduct. Men who have conducted themselves well at Millbank also receive a badge which distinguishes them

for privileges during the remaining term of their sentences, unless they commit any act which causes their good-conduct mark to be taken away. I speak of these things as I find them during my visit; but I might almost allude to them only as a part of past discipline, for the association at Millbank Prison is about to be abolished, and even while these sheets are being written the Directors of Prisons have reported as follows:—

“The associated cells formerly in use at Millbank prison have been abolished and converted into separate cells, and the discipline at that prison has been rendered still further deterrent by the adoption of a system of cellular instruction, instead of assembling the convicts in school classes, and by keeping the cell-doors bolted up during the whole period of the convict’s separate confinement. The outer doors were formerly opened after two months, giving great facilities for communication among the prisoners, and tending to destroy the effect of separation.

“The assembling of the convicts in school while they were supposed to be undergoing separate confinement is, we think, objectionable, and if the plan adopted at Millbank continues to be successful, we propose to extend it to Pentonville.

“The chaplain at Millbank states in his report that these changes have been attended with a visible improvement in the bearing and demeanour of the prisoners.

“Our object is to render this, the separate stage of their punishment, as deterrent as possible to the convicts, to habituate them to habits of order and obedience preparatory to their going on the public works, and to avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded for conveying useful instruction.”

The day’s work of the prisoners commences at six o’clock

in the morning by sweeping and cleaning the cells and wards, and on certain days holystoning the corridors and sweeping the exercise-yards. This lasts till about half-past seven, or breakfast-time; after which the prisoners attend chapel for half an hour. Dinner is served at one o'clock and supper at about half-past five, each meal occupying half an hour; and during the day exercise and instruction are so arranged that each man obtains an hour's walking or pumping in the exercise-yard, and a sufficient time at school to represent one day a week. It may well be supposed that in an establishment containing such a large number of prisoners everything has to be conducted with military precision, and the services of the convicts themselves are, as far as possible, utilised in carrying out the general arrangements; in this way, when the men in separate confinement return from exercise, each one takes up his position at the door of his cell: at the word of command they all enter their cells, except one man who bolts the doors of the rest (and does it with an unnatural alacrity), himself retiring last, to be bolted in by the officer in charge.

The kitchens, where the principal cooks are assisted by some of the prisoners (most frequently soldiers who are under sentence), are, like the rest of the building, deficient in light, and have, of course, a somewhat bare appearance, since very little apparatus is necessary for preparing the food, which, however, is well cooked and excellent in quality. A long room, obscured by the steam from the coppers and boilers, and smelling a little faintly with the odours of boiled fresh beef which the cook's assistants are now weighing at the long deal tables and depositing in covered tin cans, each of which is divided by a partition for separating the meat, soup, and vegetables; a number

of long wooden trays or troughs, with handles running along the tops (something like the trays in which pots of beer are carried from public-houses) and designed to hold the cans, form almost the entire furniture of the kitchens. The dinners are served with great rapidity, some of the prisoners being specially appointed to carry the rations to the various wards, where they are distributed by the officers.

The dietary of the prison is—breakfast, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pint of cocoa made from $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of cocoa nibs, sweetened with $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of molasses, and containing 2 oz. of milk; 8 oz. of bread. Dinner, 5 oz. of beef without bone, and weighed after boiling; 1 lb. of potatoes (or occasionally $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of potatoes and $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of parsnips or other vegetables); $\frac{1}{4}$ pint of meat liquor; 6 oz. of bread. Supper, 1 pint of gruel made with 2 oz. of oatmeal or flour, sweetened with $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of molasses; 8 oz. of bread. By the new regulations of the commission, however, a slight reduction in the quantity of food is to be tried as an experiment.

The large consumption of bread necessitates a number of bakers who are organized, in the same way as the cooks, under the superintendence of a master baker. This must certainly be one of the pleasantest of all the occupations at Millbank Prison, since the bakery is clean, light, and tolerably airy, and the work itself is far from disagreeable; although to judge from the batches of oblong loaves which are stacked in long regiments on the counters it can leave little opportunity for idling.

The dietary for sick prisoners who have been removed to the infirmary depends altogether upon the directions of the attendant surgeon, and the infirmary itself is lighter and less depressing than the ordinary portions of the building. The iron bedsteads are in some instances furnished with check curtains, and a mat is placed beside

each bed for the patient to stand upon. The amount of sickness at Millbank is sometimes very considerable, owing to the fact of the place being a general depôt at which prisoners are received soon after conviction.

The rules for preserving cleanliness include the periodical hair cutting and shaving, and bathing once a week in the baths provided for the prisoners, which occupy a portion of the lower part of the pentagon, and are a series of partitioned boxes, with a bath sunk in each floor.

The condition of our two prisoners in relation to the offence which they have committed, and the general system of punishment at Millbank, leads me to remark that the want of classification of prisoners, with regard not only to their age, but to the discipline and punishment with which their particular crime and its attendant circumstances might be associated, is worth serious consideration. It may be urged (and with some show of reason) that Millbank is only a depôt; and, again, that the present punishment inflicted on criminals there, is light enough even for the lightest average offence for which the inmates are consigned to its cells. It may be replied to the first objection that many of the prisoners do in reality stay there for a considerable time—some of them for many months; and, to the second, that the hardened ruffian who can subdue his temper while he is an inmate of Millbank is nearly as well off as the youth who has yielded to a strong temptation, or the man who has committed some rash act in a fit of momentary passion.

It may be thought that, in passing through the wards, with the opportunity of seeing so many of their inmates, a large number of brutal and forbidding countenances would shock the visitor. This is not the real impression which I receive, however, nor would it have been the

result of my own experience to have expected such an impression. It may have occurred to a good many people that, after all (and the truth of physiognomy notwithstanding), the majority of criminals must closely resemble a multitude of people who (in the eye of the law at least) are *not* criminals, and whom we meet every day. Has no intelligent observer, in looking into a window where phrenological casts have been displayed, ever imagined that there must have been, in one or two instances, some mistake by which the label of the criminal bust was accidentally transferred to the pedestal of the philanthropist, or vice versa? Even great crimes are sometimes the result of circumstances against which the evil-doer may have fought, but fought unequally and weakly, or may have been stimulated by some sudden impulse of evil too long left unchecked, and of which we may ourselves be conscious as we stand before the grated door of that prison cell. Again, the fact of the general nature of Millbank Prison explains the absence of this particular feature in prison life. The new regulations are not yet in force, and, singularly enough, it is in the school that the impression of a number of low and brutalised faces is most forcible. Here—gathered together in a long room furnished with forms, common desks, a few maps and diagrams, and a black board—the prisoners receive instruction divided into four classes, according to their previous attainments. There is a school-room to each two pentagons, and the scholars are strangely various. Somehow the stolid, indifferent, and evil faces seem to overshadow those which are more intelligent.

It may be that the most ignorant and some of the oldest men frequently occupy the front forms nearest the desk of the master; but it would be difficult to conceive

anything more sullen, dogged, and sometimes hopeless, than the expression of many of them, who seem entirely indifferent even to the entrance of a stranger. The dull room and the coarse prison dress are but the setting to a picture which represents an awful reality to ruffianism of every age and degree.

The chapel is a large and really handsome building, almost circular, occupying the centre of the gaol, and reached by three passages communicating with the different pentagons. It is, as indeed it should be, the lightest and best-fitted portion of the prison, and is surrounded with a fine gallery. This is the only prison chapel which is consecrated for the complete service; and there is a legend that a convict was once married there, just previous to his death under circumstances which involved the rightful disposition of considerable property.

The Roman Catholic prisoners are distinguished by the letters R. C. over their cells above the ticket, which, fastened to every grating, states the name, number, and term of sentence. These receive instruction from the Roman Catholic priest attached to the establishment, read the books permitted by him, and go to confession. The Roman Catholic chapel has been adapted from a large ward which was once remarkable as the general ward—a spacious apartment built out in an open court of one of the pentagons. In this place some hundred and fifty prisoners once worked in association, mostly at tailoring and shoemaking. In appearance it is a singular combination of a small railway station and the refreshment portion of a public garden—an effect produced by the light roof of glass and iron, and the presence round two sides of it of a number of wooden inclosures almost exactly like the

“boxes” in a tea-garden. In these the men formerly worked by day and slept in their hammocks at night.

The store-rooms for materials for the work of the prison, for manufactured articles, and for the necessarily large quantities of provisions, occupy a considerable space; but are scarcely so interesting as one cell which is called the “chain room,” and in which a remarkable collection of chains, fetters, and handcuffs, in every variety, is arranged upon the walls in a sort of grim festooned pattern. The use of most of these is abolished, and the simple, light “cuff” and chain alone considered necessary; but the latter are frequently in requisition in the case of prisoners who attack the warders on every opportunity.

There is little doubt that the condition of the criminals at Millbank is physically superior to that of a large number of the honest poor, and it is certain that throughout the prison arrangements the utmost care is taken to adopt only such a kind and degree of punishment as is necessarily implied in the very idea of convict labour; yet the visitor who spends some time in the building, or stands at the window of the governor’s waiting-room, thoughtfully watching the work of the yard, will begin to feel that in this particular establishment the generally dreary aspect of all the accessories, and the monotonous daily routine of work, meals, exercise, must, in many cases, be a severe penalty. But against this, again, it will be remembered that the thoughtful visitor looks at the whole process from his own point of view, and can, perhaps, never succeed in realising the manner in which it is regarded by the majority of those who are brought under its influence.

Of the ground surrounding the building there is little to be said. Airing yards, bleak and bare, intersected with narrow brick or stone paths, upon which the convicts walk

at a regular pace in single file, and about six feet apart. A walled waste of garden ground, where the convalescents work with hoe, or spade, or roller. A blank and now unused burial yard, where the nameless graves of former prisoners who have died within the walls are varied in a few instances by the headstones which mark the burial-place of two or three prison officials or their relatives. The inner aspect of Millbank is close, dark, and sombre; its walled area suggestive only of the unwholesome neighbourhood of the low-lying river-shore, and of the purpose to which the building itself is devoted.

The entrance yard, with its offices, is more lightsome; and here, as I return, the prison van has just deposited some new inmates, including my two ruffians. They are at this moment in the reception-ward, where beyond the row of cells there is a row of baths, to which they are at once conducted. After they have taken off the clothes in which they have been brought from Newgate, they will be examined by the surgeon in a cell at the end of the ward, and in the uniform of Millbank will be consigned to one or other of the pentagons.

XII.

PENTONVILLE PRISON.

PENTONVILLE, or, as it was formerly called, "The Model Prison," was built in 1842 (at a cost of £85,000), for the reception of convicts selected to undergo probationary imprisonment previous to their transportation to the colonies.

It may not be out of place to mention here that this prison was originally intended only as a sort of preparation for penal servitude abroad, and that the "ticket-of-leave system" introduced amongst this class of convicts was applied only to those who were sentenced to Van Diemen's Land.

"I propose," said Sir James Graham, in his letter to the commissioners, "that no prisoner shall be admitted into Pentonville without the knowledge that it is the portal to the penal colony, and without the certainty that he bids adieu to his connections in England, and that he must henceforth look forward to a life of labour in another hemisphere. He should be made to feel that from that day (the day of his entrance into the prison) he enters on a new career. He should be told that his imprisonment is a period of probation; that it will not be prolonged above eighteen months; that an opportunity of learning those arts which will enable him to earn his bread will be afforded, under the best instructors; that moral and religious knowledge will be imparted to him, as a guide to his

future life; that at the end of eighteen months, when a just estimate can be formed of the effect produced by the discipline on his character, he will be sent to Van Diemen's Land, there, if he behave well, at once to receive a ticket-of-leave, which is equivalent to freedom, with the certainty of abundant maintenance, the fruit of industry. If, however, he behave indifferently he will, on being transported to Van Diemen's Land, receive a probationary pass which will secure to him only a limited portion of his earnings, and impose certain galling restrictions on his personal liberty.

"If, on the other hand, he behave ill, and the discipline of the prison be ineffectual, he will be transported to Tasman's Peninsula, there to work in a probationary gang, without wages, and deprived of liberty—an abject convict."

Pentonville Prison, then, was originally devised as a sort of penal training establishment for convicts sentenced to transportation, and it still retains so much of this character as devotes it to the reception of prisoners who undergo the longer terms of servitude which consign them to the various Government stations in this country.

Having previously learned thus much of its history and intention, I prepare to pay it a personal visit, still keeping in view the cases of the two patients to whose cure such careful attention is bestowed. I am not long in discovering that the place itself differs exceedingly from that gloomy pile at Millbank. It is true that it stands in an unfinished-looking, bleak, and somewhat melancholy neighbourhood—there may be some influence in all prisons which will affect their surroundings in this way;—but the building itself seems to have little in common with the prevailing expression.

Arriving in the early morning at the Caledonian Road station of the North London Railway, I have noticed the pre-

sence of blue-frocked, hoarse, and somewhat greasy fellow-passengers, and have heard a sound of lowing and bleating so pastoral in its character that it is unaccountable except by remembering that the cattle-market lies at only a short distance. For the rest, the whole locality bears the neglected and slovenly appearance of a neighbourhood habitually awakened at preternaturally early hours. The taverns especially seem to resent this condition of existence by an unbraced and slipshod demeanour, and a look of sordid dissipation which the unthinking are too apt to associate with "night-houses." Nothing, on the contrary, can, as a rule, be more (metaphorically) spiritless than the air of an early-rising public-house. But it is neither with the taverns nor their neighbourhood that I have to do; for here is the square, massive entrance to the prison, closed in front, but reached by a gate in the side, to which a broad, paved causeway leads from an iron wicket at the end of the "curtain" wall.

When once the warder's lodge is passed, and the visitor traverses the neat gravel yard, and ascends the flight of white steps leading to the half-glazed door, the imagination wanders between a hospital and a Government office, everything is so quiet and so clean. After entering the governor's waiting-room, and recording his name and the authority by which he receives permission to inspect the building in a book kept for the purpose, he is consigned by the governor to the care of an intelligent officer, and commences his tour of the prison. Even on a dull, heavy day those four long and lofty corridors are singularly light and pleasant, lighter, indeed, than that occupied by the offices, from which they spread like the sails of a wind-mill, or four sticks of a fan.

Here there are no close and stifling passages of solid

brickwork, no dark and devious staircases leading to blind entries and double-locked barricades—no faint and sickly smell of long-imprisoned air. The smooth, clean floors of asphalte in the lofty arcades are almost an agreeable promenade, while the two stories of light and graceful iron galleries which occupy each corridor are reached by slender iron stairs, and there is an open view not only from end to end of the building, but from floor to ceiling.

Behind each one of that long series of clean painted doors, opening on to the ground floor, and the galleries above, a man is working out his sentence for a crime. It is a strange sad show which is revealed when that circular iron concealing the peephole is turned, and I look through into some of the cells. Some criminals, intent upon their work, keep steadily sewing, hammering, or mat-making, unconscious that they are observed; others affect to be ignorant of this fact, but betray themselves by a suddenly increased assiduity, while some glance quickly, and with a painfully furtive expression at the peephole, and fall to work again with the knowledge that a human eye, but are ignorant *what* eye, is noting them. One, at least, is mistaken, and shifts his glance uneasily to the square flap through which he receives his dole of food—in the vague impression that it is dinner-time.

Still it is not easy for the visitor who has recently left Millbank to associate this place with suffering, or at all events with physical suffering; the general effect is too airy and pleasant to suggest even deep depression. This is not, however, the result of the spotless cleanliness which is everywhere so apparent; for, although this is a pleasant accompaniment to the main building, there is something peculiarly blank and hopeless about the smooth and bare surface of the cell-walls, something terribly un-

sympathetic in the rigid monotony of unbroken order which is stamped upon each small detail of the prison furniture.

In every cell the prisoner is working at one or other of the trades which are taught both here and at Millbank. In the case of his having undergone a period of confinement at the latter prison, he frequently comes to Pentonville a workman more or less skilled in some handicraft. Weaving cloth and calico for the convict establishments as well as the navy, shoemaking, mat and rug weaving, and tailoring, are the principal occupations; and in every cell the gas is arranged at a height to suit the class of work carried on by the prisoner. In mat making, where it is necessary to force together the fibrous cords of which the body of the mat is composed, the prisoner works with a wooden mallet, sharply shod with iron, and I learn, as I expected to learn, that this has sometimes been used against the warders as a very dangerous weapon. The weavers have, of course, less room to move about in than the others, since their looms occupy a large space; but each cell is light, and of a convenient size. The furniture consists of a copper wash basin and a closet pan, both well supplied with water from a tap which is connected with a cistern above the cell; a table flap against the wall, a stool, and the hammock and bedding, neatly rolled up during the day, and at night slung to the two staples, which, like everything else in the cell, are spotlessly bright and clean. Two or three triangular shelves of deal serve to hold the spoon, platter, tin knife, saltcellar, &c.; and on the table may frequently be seen, beside the Bible, such books as are lent to the prisoners from the library. Entering a cell in the absence of the usual inmate, who is learning to weave, and is now out for

exercise, I see upon the table, beside a copy-book closely written in short-hand, 'The Divine Authority of the Scriptures,' 'Milner's History of England,' 'Sismondi's Italian Republic,' and 'Selections from the Poets.' It is unnecessary to say that this cell is occupied by a man whose education is above the average, and that even with these alleviations his punishment may be equal to, if not greater than, that of the merely ignorant ruffian. At Pentonville, as at Millbank, the prisoner is known only by his number, all names are at an end; but in each cell hangs a card inscribed with the previous occupation, date of conviction, and term of sentence, of the occupant. Here, as at Newgate, a small handle or button in the wall of the cell communicates with a gong in the corridor, and at the moment that this is struck a metal plate bearing the number of the cell starts out at right angles from the wall outside the door, so that the warder may at once see to what spot he has been summoned.

At six o'clock in the morning the cells are unlocked, and each prisoner is provided with a tub and the means of sweeping and scrubbing his cell. This effected, the corridors, galleries, and entrances are cleaned by separate detachments, each of which is appointed to a particular duty under the inspection of the officers, who watch them either in the corridors or from the light iron bridges which connect the galleries. The various detachments are called, and this part of their work effected with almost military precision, and after the cleansing of the prison is completed the men are provided with their tools and materials by the trade instructors, and work in their cells till seven, when the bell rings for breakfast, which consists of three-quarters of a pint of cocoa, made with three quarters of an ounce of the pure flake and two

ounces of milk, and sweetened with six drachms of molasses. From eight to nine o'clock is the hour for chapel, and afterwards the prisoners who are not either in the infirmary or undergoing punishment receive instruction in their cells or go out for exercise in the yards, resuming their work when they have occupied the hour given to each, and all returning to their cells at twelve o'clock. For the last half hour, it being now upon the stroke of twelve, I have been watching that long line of men, clad in the coarse, grayish-brown prison dress, walking rapidly in single file along the narrow strips of pavement which are laid down in concentric rings in the exercising yards. There is no lagging, for they are made to move forward at a brisk pace; and although communications occasionally pass between them even at the distance at which they are separated, it must be difficult for the uninitiated to bestow many confidences on each other. There are four of these airing-grounds; but the men who are under punishment exercise in separate yards—several longwalled and white-washed alleys radiating from a central building—like a substantial dome-covered summer-house—to the different divisions of the building from which the prisoners are brought. The walls of the “summer-house” just mentioned seem to consist of strong doors, each of which is the end of one of the yards, and can overlook it by means of a wire-guarded aperture. It is not there that I am standing, however, but at the very summit of the prison, to which the governor of the establishment has led me by so many spiral staircases that I am not a little giddy. From this height I can look down upon the external arrangements of the building, which reminds me of a gigantic toy just put together out of a great chip-deal box; a mechanical toy, however, for I can obtain a birdseye view of the

grounds, of the divisions of the yards, of the long brown stream of prisoners moving in circles round the brick paths; the outer walls, where the warders' houses stand like postern towers; and that division where some privileged prisoners, whose good conduct entitles them to the small amount of association labour accorded at Pentonville, are busy with spade and barrow.

But twelve strikes, and all the men are once more busy in their cells. There is time before dinner to see the storerooms, where great piles of cloth for convict garments, a stock of "liberty clothes" for discharged prisoners, according to their previous position; and a wonderful assortment of calico, canvas, tweed, and boots and shoes of all makes and sizes, occupy the shelves of a series of apartments below the basement, almost exactly resembling the warehouse of some large city firm.

The most attractive manufacture of Pentonville seems to be ornamental mats and rugs, including hearthrugs. Of these there are an almost endless variety of very superior quality, and many of them of bright colours and handsome patterns. To attend to the storerooms is another privilege of certain prisoners, and the bright look which comes into the faces of the men as the governor orders them to display some of the goods they have in charge speaks volumes in favour of such a relaxation of prison rigour in some cases. The other associations are those of the bakers and the cooks, so, as dinner time is approaching and I am promised a convict repast, I hasten to see how the principal meal of the day will be dispensed, learning on my way that the water for the use of the prison is obtained from an artesian well, and that woe may be confidently expected to betide the contractor who should supply an adulterated article for prison diet.

On the journey to the kitchen it is worth while to turn aside to discover the meaning of the aromatic smell which pervades a portion of the offices abutting on one of the yards. It is here that the cocoa nibs are roasted, ground, and flaked, so that there can be no possibility of any spurious admixture. Scarcely less pleasant is the odour from the batch of bread which is just being drawn from the ovens in the bakery. Of the 560 prisoners in Pentonville Prison it may be doubted whether one ever ate bread so pure as that of which he now receives twenty ounces a day. The quality is that known among bakers as the best seconds, but of flour which undergoes a very rigid examination, and with no adulteration in the process of manufacture. The loaves, which lie in long rows, are small, and of the shape known as "brick."

Having seen and written something of the bakeries of the metropolis, and the bread made in them, I make some slight examination of one of the loaves, and am led to believe that the prison bread of Pentonville is equal if not superior to that which is ordinarily consumed by middle-class families.

There is a slight bustle in the kitchen just now, for the 560 dinners will have to be served in some ten or twelve minutes, and the great coppers of soup are bubbling, and the potatoes are steaming over the hot pipes by which all the cooking is effected; while one of the *chefs* is already busy cutting and weighing the allowance of meat. Here, too, the assistant cooks are mostly military prisoners, and do their work admirably. The dinner at Pentonville is a good, nourishing, substantial meal, and the soup, which is now steaming from the open coppers and making the rather dark underground kitchen still more foggy, is as strong and rich of meat as that usually sold at the best

eating-houses in London. *Crede experto.* The potatoes are of the mealiest and the soup the meatiest that I have tasted for some time past, charity dinners included. The dietary orders include beef and mutton on alternate days, and the liquor of yesterday's boiling is made into to-day's soup by the addition of shins or other coarse parts of beef, carrots, onions, and a little seasoning.

The ordinary rations for dinner are four ounces of cooked meat without bone, half a pint of the soup just mentioned, a pound of potatoes, and five ounces of bread, but here, as at Millbank, a slightly reduced scale of living is about to be tried as an experiment. Men for whom extra diet is ordered have two pounds of potatoes, while of course the men in the infirmary receive whatever is ordered, even wine or spirits, if necessary.

Several large wooden trays have already been brought forward and filled with round tin cans, each of which contains a partition to divide the meat and potatoes from the soup. When these are filled a wooden flap opens in the floor of the corridor above the kitchen, and they are raised by means of a lifting apparatus, the iron rods of which reach from the bottom to the top of the building. Those rations destined for the lower cells are wheeled along the corridors in trucks, while for the upper series the iron tops of the parallel galleries make a tramway, and the trucks are pushed along the corridor with wonderful ease and despatch. Two officers attend each truck, one of them opens the square flap in the door of each cell, upon which, as it falls inwards and makes a sort of shelf or table, the other deposits the ration, so that the whole of the prisoners are served in an incredibly short space of time.

The afternoon passes principally in the ordinary work

of the prison until half-past five, which is the prisoners' supper-time. This meal consists of a pint of gruel, made with an ounce and a half of meal, and sweetened with six drachms of molasses, together with five ounces of bread. The personal cleanliness of the prison is strictly enforced, and a series of baths, enclosed by separate boxes where there is room to dress and undress, occupies a portion of the building. It is no part of my intention to express any very decided opinion on the relative merits or demerits of "our convict system." I visit these prisons to describe, not to discuss; but I may say without prejudice that the health and physical comfort of the British felon is better cared for than that of the ordinary British pauper, and receives far more earnest attention than that of the British soldier or the British sailor.

The principal distinctions made at Pentonville are between the prisoners who are known to be desperate and dangerous, the unruly criminals sent back from the public works to undergo a second probation, those who are working out their first nine months' preparation, and the men who have conducted themselves so well as to be entitled to a badge and to the advantage of association work; but here, as in Millbank, the conclusions arrived at by the commission of inquiry into prison discipline are unfavorable to association during this stage, and complete separate confinement will now be substituted for it. Although corporal punishment is sometimes resorted to, the usual discipline for the worst part of the prisoners is the dark cell and the punishment diet, which consists of only a pound of bread a day and water to drink. This is said to be more effectual than any other method, although many of the old offenders care very little for the "horrors" of the black room, and sleep away the greater part of their

time there. These cells are similar to those at Millbank, and are placed under the same regulations.

One of the most common offences is talking in chapel, or otherwise endeavouring to establish communications with another prisoner. It would be idle to suppose that these attempts are always detected; the utmost vigilance is inadequate to prevent it, and it is the consciousness of this difficulty which has induced the Directors of Prisons to abolish the association of the criminals altogether. The chapel, which is a large square building, was formerly fitted with long seats, divided into entirely separate stalls, concealing the prisoners from each other, the officers occupying very elevated desks commanding the whole area of the floor. These were found inadequate to prevent communication, however, since they in reality gave greater opportunities for the prisoners to conceal their faces, and now only ordinary forms are placed along the ground floor, the seats beside the high pulpit being reserved for the governor and deputy governor. The warders occupy raised seats (similar to those of the monitors' desks at schools), which are placed along the walls, so that each officer can overlook about six forms, and it is believed that there is now less talking even under cover of the prayer-book and during the responses. But some of the older prisoners can speak without moving a muscle of the face, and even in the cells various methods of communicating by speaking through the water-pipes, or by the mysterious organization of a code of signals by a given number and variety of taps upon the wall have been from time to time discovered.

The prisoners are draughted from the chapel by means of a sort of signal-plate which stands in the lobby at the entrance; and is worked in a similar way to the con-

trivances used in offices for showing the date of the month, by shifting a card opposite a hole in the front of the box. This summons each section of the congregation to return to the cells in proper order.

There is but little time to walk through the clean and airy infirmary, and to visit the violent prisoner who has been placed in the dark, padded cell and subjected to a shower bath, for already fresh arrivals are here from Millbank, and our two ruffians among them. He of the lowering face has already received an indifferent character : he is still moody, sullen, and apparently hopeless. His companion looks round him with a mingled expression of indignation and cunning. He will work well and keep quiet, and will get a badge, and finally reduce his sentence by a ticket-of-leave, but perhaps neither for his own good nor that of the community. They are both standing now with the rest of the prisoners who have come from Millbank handcuffed. The doctor, who has received a certificate of their health, inspects them, presently, asking them a few questions, and is followed by the governor, who speaks to them kindly but firmly of the discipline and regulations of the prison. After a short address from the chaplain, they are marshalled into the rooms where they strip for examination and the bath, a regulation necessary to prevent them from concealing any article of which they may have contrived to possess themselves, and particular letters, of which they will be allowed to receive one from their friends every three months, subject to good conduct and the inspection of all letters (either sent or received) by the governor and chaplain. The two, whose period of servitude has here reached its second stage, are consigned to separate corridors. One of them (the intractable) is standing with folded arms and clenched hands in the very

middle of his cell, glaring like some sullen, half-tamed brute who will presently dash itself against the door. The other is seated on his stool, looking on the ground; but he gets up presently and turns carelessly to a printed form which hangs against the wall with the card already mentioned. This is a "Notice to Convicts," explaining how he may receive a visit from his friends after a certain period of good conduct; how he may receive a diet superior to that already described; how he may, by industry and similar good conduct, become entitled to a badge, which will entitle him to certain privileges, the principal of which will at first be his recommendation to the gratuities that are placed to the credit of certain prisoners, and may be increased at each stage until, when he reaches the public works, they will amount to about tenpence a week for the whole time of his subsequent servitude; and how he may, if he persevere in his good endeavours, be placed in such a position on his removal to the public works that the term for which he is sentenced may be shortened one fourth by a ticket of leave. The new prisoner is only disturbed from his contemplation of these advantages by the arrival of his supper, and as the can of gruel is pushed in at the open trap it may be conjectured that he is already looking beyond the probation of Pentonville, and anticipating the outdoor labour of the Isle of Portland, whither I intend to follow him.

XIII.

THE CONVICT ESTABLISHMENT AT PORTLAND.

WHEN I left my two convicts to work out the period of their second stage of servitude at Pentonville Prison, I remarked that one of them, at least, probably looked forward with some hope to his removal to the Government establishment in the island of Portland. Had he known how large a measure of liberty would be secured by attaining this third stage his anticipations would have been even more pleasant; or, on the other hand, I may wrong him by not having taken into consideration the likelihood that he *had* heard all about it from some acquaintance who had recalled the pleasant memories of this penal settlement long after obtaining that "ticket," of which he found it difficult to make any practical use.

However this may be, it is certain that in this last and considerably longest stage the thralldom of separate confinement and silent labour, commenced at Millbank and rather refined than mitigated at Pentonville, is virtually abandoned. Increased diet, healthy work in the open, bracing air, and companionship (which includes conversation) during the hours of labour, must make Portland a sort of paradise, where imprisonment is abolished in favour of friendly guardianship and wholesome restraint. This would doubtless be the impression upon the mind of a convict on whom his previous discipline had produced the desired effect, and who came out into the corridor at

Pentonville on the morning of his removal, chastened, reformed, and repentant ; that it is really the opinion of a very large majority of the eleven hundred and fifteen felons, most of whom are now quarrying stones for Portland Breakwater, would be too much to expect. The faces of the eight men who have just been assembled in the prison-yard at Pentonville, and amongst whom the two whose course I have been following now meet closely for the first time since their conviction, express very little if any emotion beyond that involved in the endeavour to keep warm ; for it is a dull, chilly morning, and their sudden transition from the temperate atmosphere of the cells has made them shiver a little in the raw air from the yard. Very little alteration is observable in their demeanour until they reach the railway station, to which they are taken in the prison van, pretty securely fastened by a light chain passing from one to another through the handcuff. Once there and seated in the carriage, they look for some opportunity to communicate with the outer world, and probably surprise some strange passenger who is standing on the platform and who happens to regard them intently, by telegraphing with their fingers the number of years they have to serve. With this and such few observations amongst themselves as are permitted by the officer in charge they must be content until they reach Weymouth ; but it would be difficult to estimate the effect upon men so long confined within prison limits, and especially the dull routine of the separate cells ; of that ride through the pure, bracing air, with the sight of the wild, open country, the sheltered homesteads, the clustering villages, the birds upon the wing, the cattle browsing on the hills. Whatever may be its influence, however, they are not very demonstrative ; many of them look on, if not listlessly, at least with an appearance of stolid

indifference like that which rests upon the face of our beetle-browed ruffian. His companion notes these things, indeed, with a quick glance and a slight smile, not without a shade of sarcasm; once or twice he indicates some object in the landscape, but finally relapses into that dogged half-patient look which seems habitual even to the best of the convicts, and under which who shall tell what are their real thoughts?

With very little alteration in this demeanour, but with quick, suspiciously inquiring glances, they make the journey from Weymouth to Portland; only now and then one of their number fixes his eye steadfastly on the ships far out at sea. Its great expanse must bring upon him a strange sense of freedom. Then, as they begin to climb the rugged road which leads to the summit of this "hearth-stone" island; as they pass Fortune's Well, and at length emerge amidst the broken stony ground: the treeless waste; the rough, zigzag stone walls; the bare, yellowish-white cottages and scattered taverns; the chaos of stone, from which in this part of the island some rude settlement seems to have sprung, they have enough to occupy their attention. Past the last rude farm plot, beside the steep road cut up with iron tramways, and round by that row of high white cottages (the quarters of the married prison officers), and they have arrived at their destination. And this is my destination also, for which I have sternly resisted all the fascinations of Weymouth, its pleasant resorts and fashionable society, the dignified composure,—not to say dulness of its broad promenade and the attractive beauty of its broad bay, with the green hills and the "White Horse" in the distance,—not even the guide book ('Antiquities of Portland') itself can, for the present, change me from the purpose for which I have made the

journey from London. The Castle once the residence of that Bluff King and bloated criminal, who himself essayed to put down cutpurses and footpads, to which end he planted the gallows trees in such goodly numbers; the Portland Arms where George the Third of glorious memory was wont to dine, and where is kept the old Danish Reeve staff,—that ancient tally or score on which the bailiff of the island kept account of acreage and manor dues,—Rufus, or Bow and Arrow Castle; the Old Church; the New Church; even the Light-houses fail to divert my interest from the great waste of stone-quarry, wild hill-rise, and furzy-grass, where even the “wheat-ear,”—the only bird which seems to be found upon the island,—is seldom seen, and amidst which the convict settlement lies hedged in with long straggling walls.

From a queer old hostelry near the pier,—where there seems to be neither bar nor parlour nor friendly tap,—the burning brandy being served to you from a long irregular space behind a low metal-topped counter, and with an air of secrecy as though it were dimly associated with some reminiscences of smuggling; I contrive to hire, after much doubt on the part of the landlord (who speaks a polyglot jargon of Jersey French, Welsh English, and Basque Spanish), a springless vehicle composed apparently of two primitive gigs fastened together and set upon four wheels, and in this am driven by a silent boy up the steep and boulder-broken roads, and across the rugged tramways leading to the home of the British convict.

Portland Prison, which is constructed to contain 1500 convicts, is composed of three long and lofty parallelograms (one of which is a double building), and a large block in form of a wing lying somewhat in the rear of one of the main structures. All these are built of stone, in

the same way as the houses on the island; the single buildings containing four and the double buildings five stories of cells, the upper ones opening from light iron corridors, similar to those at Pentonville, the corridors and the whole of the main building being lighted principally from the roof. The spaces between the blocks of building, which are spanned above by an iron bridge extending from one block to another, serve as open areas in which the prisoners are paraded every day before being taken out to labour. Beyond these, in front of the prison is the garden where the vegetables are grown for the prison consumption. The other garden, which is in fact no more than a neat grass-plotted yard, in the area before the inner entrance, contains some curious remains dug up from the quarries during the progress of the works: among them are stone sarcophagi in which skeletons were discovered—remnants of the Roman occupation of the island; an immense petrified tree-trunk, still exhibiting the grain and bark of the wood; an altar-slab, and some large description of stone-imbedded shell or marine animal which goes in Portland by the name of “conger eel,” and in which the articulations, or rather corrugations, are quite distinct.

Leaving these reminiscences of its former condition, however, for the more commonplace divisions of the prison, I am conducted to the storerooms, where the clothes and shoes which have been made in the London establishments are kept for the inmates at Portland. Here I recognise the heavy, nailed boots, the rough clothing, and the quilts and blankets which I have previously seen in their various stages of manufacture at Millbank and Pentonville.

Amongst the few convicts who are engaged within the

building I notice some variety of costume, and learn that the regulation dress consists of cord trousers, a blue "slop," or coarse frock of blue striped with white, and a light blue striped cap; these, which are the summer garments, give place in winter to a brownish-gray jacket similar to those worn at the London prisons, and a black oil-skin hat painted with coloured stripes. Those men whose term has nearly expired, from its having been shortened in consequence of good conduct, are dressed in a blue suit, with "P. P." stamped upon it in red letters—"an odd arrangement," which gives them the appearance of having been wrongly "delivered" at various stations by some parcels' conveyance company. The party which has just arrested my attention are bringing in bread, under the direction of a couple of officers, and I follow them to the bakery—necessarily a large building, since it has to provide for such an army of eaters. At Portland none of these offices are under the basement, so that the bakery is, in reality, a lofty and well-lighted adjunct to the main building, opening on to one of the yards, its row of ovens and the bins and troughs scrupulously clean, and the whole place well ventilated. Every day a separate loaf of the required weight for each meal is furnished to the prisoner; the bread being of the same quality as that used at the London establishments. The kitchen is a similar building to the bakery, and contrasts favorably with those of the London prisons on account of its lightness. The arrangements are precisely similar, except that at Portland only beef is provided; but the method of cooking is the same, and the great coppers of soup, the joints of meat, and the huge steamers which hold the potatoes give forth a savoury smell to appetites sharpened by that clear sea air. Although

no trades are taught or carried on at Portland, there are workshops where such of the men as are selected for the purpose (from having previously had some experience in these callings, either in or out of prison) carry on the necessary repairs connected with the establishment. For this purpose one or two large rooms are appropriated to the tailors and shoemakers, who mend the boots and clothes which have been worn by former inmates, and the carpenters' and blacksmiths' shops are busy with the sound of saw and hammer, in order to keep up the repairs connected with the building, or to replace the furniture of the various departments. In these shops the men work under the direction of instructors; but the silent system is not a part of the discipline at Portland, so that the business of the day goes on under very few depressing influences. Perhaps the most interesting of the workshops is the forge, where the machinery is repaired, and the men work at bellows and anvil, upon the iron fittings of the cranes and stone-carriages. I wish I could say that the work is willingly and cheerfully performed; but I am bound to state, that in many instances the *weight* of the hammer slowly performs the labour. There is very little weight of arm or energy of muscle displayed beyond that which is actually required to lift the tools. The cells are comfortable little cabins enough, not of course as large as those of the London prisons, since no labour has to be performed in them. They are sleeping apartments, of about four feet wide, seven in length, and seven feet high, each furnished with a window, and the walls formed of corrugated iron. They contain a slung hammock, with mattress, blankets, sheets, and quilts; a stool and wash-basin; and a nest of deal shelves, in which the prisoner keeps his plate, mug, and pannikin of tinware, such books

as he is allowed to borrow from the library, and other small articles of daily use.

On their arrival at Portland the prisoners receive a considerably augmented provision of food, since it is understood that their constant labour in the open air requires that the quantity should be increased. The ordinary meals consist of breakfast, for which they receive a pint of cocoa, with milk and sugar, and 28 oz. of bread for the day. The dinner allowance of each man is, Sunday, 5 oz. of cheese; Monday, 5 oz. of mutton for dinner, and its own liquor flavoured with onions, and thickened with any bread left from the previous day. Tuesday, 1 pint of soup made from 9 oz. of shin of beef; 4 oz. of fresh vegetables; 2 oz. of pearl barley, soup flavoured and thickened as on Mondays; Wednesday, same diet as on Monday; Thursday, 1 pound of suet pudding; Friday, 5 oz. of beef, with a pint of beef liquor, flavoured and thickened as on Tuesday; Saturday, same diet as on Friday; during the week, 1 pint of cocoa for breakfast, and 1 pint of gruel for supper. Each allowance of meat is weighed, after being cooked, and must be free from bone. One pound of good potatoes is served to each man daily at dinner, except on Sundays, when the convicts do no hard work. To these rations the good-conduct men whose period has nearly expired have certain very welcome additions. They may obtain tea in place of the evening gruel, and sometimes dine off baked beef, with the addition of suet pudding. On Sundays, too, they are often allowed half a pint of beer with their slice of cheese.

This, which is the diet according to the new regulations, and is diminished from that which was allowed until July of the present year, would, I cannot but imagine, be a luxurious scale of living to many an honest labourer;—one, indeed, beyond his utmost dreams; and yet when this

dietary table was first acted upon there were indications both at Dartmoor and at this settlement at Portland, which caused the authorities to fear a dangerous riot. The pampered ruffians absolutely refused to work, and were very properly placed in irons, but the military were called in, and threatened to fire on the ringleaders unless they submitted.

While I am gathering this information under the intelligent guidance of one of the principal warders, our convicts have been admitted to the prison, where the roll has been called over by an officer, after which they have been submitted to the baths, similar to those with which they were recently familiar, have been freshly cropped and shaved, have been examined by the medical officer, and have assumed the uniform of Portland in exchange for their former dress. After having been draughted to their cells and furnished with the regulation meal, they are conducted to the chapel, where they will be spoken to by the chaplain and have a half day in every week appointed on which they will be expected to attend school. The chapel, which is also used as the schoolroom, is a spacious building, containing a pulpit and reading desk, and a deep gallery for the wives and families of the officers.

The prisoners, who all assemble here twice a day for prayers, occupy forms on the floor, while the officers sit on seats elevated against the wall where they can overlook their various divisions. School is going on as I enter the building, and three or four teachers are giving instruction by means of books, slates, and black boards. One of the prisoners, a keen, quick-eyed fellow, is engaged apart at a table in re-binding some of the books belonging to the prison library; and I observe that he is not only neat and skilful in his manipulation, but is at work with a rapidity

and apparent earnestness which is one of the most surprising things I have witnessed during my visit.

I cannot but remark, too, that the faces of the majority of the scholars are less dull and dogged than those of the London prisoners; that they have brightened, not only with the evidences of health, but with those of renewed interest. In this light, lofty chapel, and with a tolerably attractive lesson, there must be something very holiday-like in their afternoon's occupation.

A bell which rings presently is the signal for the return of the convicts from work, and, as our two criminals once more retire to their cells, the various companies come in for the night and assemble for evening prayers.

It should be remembered that the present system of penal servitude was originally intended only to prepare convicts for working out the remainder of the term in another country, and that the "ticket of leave" was not at first designed for any but transported felons, who might look forward hopefully to a more virtuous career under entirely new conditions. This fact was warmly insisted on by the late Sir Joshua Jebb during a conversation with the writer; and, indeed, it will serve to explain the apparent failure which seems so often to attend the sequel of our present scheme of secondary punishments.

Apart from this consideration, however, the visitor to the two metropolitan prisons of which I have already given some description will be impressed with the anxious care with which not only the health but the complete physical comfort of the criminal is preserved. At Pentonville this is more observable even than at Millbank; but the idea acquires strength as it advances, and at Portland the full development of the system renders it impossible to avoid comparing the lot of the convicted felon,

not alone with that of the more unfortunate amongst the paupers, but with that of the soldier or sailor under duty, or of the poor, honest labourer, whose daily bread is dependent upon his continued exertion.

It is true that this comparison does not necessarily involve the conclusion that criminals should either receive less tender nurture or more positive punishment; but in a district like Portland, where the contrast is so easily made between convicted felons, well clothed, well lodged, fully fed, comfortably provided, and by no means overworked, and a number of labourers in the same locality, to whom the prison fare would be something very much like "high living," the impression naturally takes the form of an argument, and the anomaly is too easily confounded with practical injustice.

The various "companies" (they are too susceptible of a convict's feelings to call them "gangs" at Portland, and on my using this term, I am at once put to confusion by the deprecatory correction of my guide), are now coming in from the quarry, and enter the gates as they arrive in their divisions, under the charge of the armed officers, in blue uniforms, who superintend their work. They are, for the most part, healthy and fleshy looking fellows, and with all the variety of countenance which an assembly of mixed prisoners would necessarily present. As I stand looking at them, and still with the comparison of which I have just spoken in my mind, I think of the anecdote of that worthy gentleman who, in reply to the demand of his butler for an increased salary, said—

"Do you know that your income already exceeds that of many clergymen in the Established Church?"

"I have always been exceedingly sorry for those gentlemen," replied the butler, with dignity, "but that is no

reason why I should forego my own reasonable advantages."

What are the reflections of the two inmates whose progress I have been following it would be difficult to determine. On their way to the prison they have caught a glimpse of some of those sentries, armed with sword and carbine, who form a cordon round the works, and the sight may not have been reassuring. On the entrance of the labourers, and after a glance at their faces, however, the more hopeful ruffian brightens up a little, and each of them is presently conducted to his cell, there to prepare for the new field of exertion which will open to him to-morrow.

They, in common with the rest, are awakened by the ringing of the bell at five o'clock in the morning, and are expected to sweep their cells and to perform their toilet in time for breakfast, the serving of which commences at a quarter to six o'clock, by means of wooden trays (resembling the gratings used to stand upon at baths), on which the rations are carried from the kitchen to the cells. At half-past six o'clock all the prisoners assemble in the chapel for morning prayers, which occupy only a few minutes, and at a quarter to seven they are paraded in their various divisions in the open areas which divide the blocks of building forming the prison. In advance of these, and extending almost along the entire front of the prison, is a raised embankment, its smooth sides covered with mown grass, and with an even walk upon the top, and here the officers stand to inspect the divisions as they are arranged to proceed to the quarries. Confusion is prevented by the number of each detachment being distinctly painted upon a sort of large garden-labels, one of which is stuck in the slope of the embankment opposite

the spot which each company is to occupy on parade. Here they undergo a rapid superficial search at the hands of the officers, and by seven o'clock the various companies have mostly passed beyond the precincts of the building, and have reached their various stations.

The scene of their labour is sufficiently striking on a first visit, not from any great appearance of activity which it presents, but on account of the wild and rugged aspect of the country. The portion of the island on which the penal settlement is stationed is, by its position, entirely cut off even from the sight of the town or villages occupying the other side; and, except a seascape in one part of it, and a view of the green slope of the fortifications in another, is entirely confined to the convicts. With this important exception, however,—that closely adjoining the Government quarries, lie those which are being wrought by ordinary labourers. In alluding to the fortifications it is almost necessary to mention the Portland sheep which browse upon its grassy slopes. They are small, compact, military-looking animals, the latter qualification being due to the practice of rubbing the entire fleece with red ochre—probably for the purpose of distinguishing them amongst the yellowish-white stones with which the whole island is covered.

Nearly surrounded by a rough stone wall, which formerly included the whole of the works connected with the prison, lies the Old St. Paul's Quarry, where some of the blocks which were rejected for the building of the metropolitan cathedral are still cumbering the ground. Getting out the huge blocks dispersed along the cutting, or removing the rubble from the surface where the new operations are commenced, the convicts work in detachments of from eighteen to twenty-two men, each division being watched

by a warder whose hours of duty are longer, and his onerous charge more wearisome, than the labour of the felons. Other companies are engaged in loading the heavy stone-carriages, in dragging them along the tramways, or in "dressing" the great blocks in an open space amidst great gaunt cranes of timber and rusty chains used for lifting and swinging the heavy masses of building-stone.

All round by the encircling wall, from look-out stations on the top of it, or standing on high mounds artificially raised for the purpose, the armed sentries keep constant watch; but the men are under as little control as is in any degree consistent with the fact of their being prisoners, and talk together with comparative freedom while they leisurely pursue their allotted occupation: there is certainly a great difference between their rate of working and that of the ordinary quarrymen who are engaged by the contractors at the neighbouring cuttings.

There is something singularly picturesque in the appearance of the broken ground and the high white walls of solid stone full of great fissures whence blocks have been taken. This is, perhaps, more apparent in the newer quarry just without the old boundary, where a huge slice seems to have been cut away from the surface—as though the island had been treated like a cheese and partly demolished with a broad scoop.

The walls left half round this amphitheatre are in some places thirty or forty feet high, and the timber bridge which crosses a cleft in one part is supported on buttresses left standing when all around them had been removed. Almost the whole surface is broken and rugged, and winding tramways lead to a great shed raised on timber piles and containing an enormous "drum," on which a chain is coiled for letting the stone-waggons down a steep

incline towards the breakwater, where they are received and carried away by the locomotive engines. The prison area does not, however, extend so far as this, the stone being delivered at the boundary, where it is taken in charge by the proper officials.

It would, perhaps, be absurd to suppose that the convicts do not occasionally communicate with persons outside the prison, and, notwithstanding the vigilant supervision, there is no doubt that they sometimes contrive to obtain money from their friends, or become possessed of small quantities of tobacco; the endeavours to make use of the most trifling opportunities to obtain contraband articles being probably keen enjoyments which are pretty often experienced, especially as any small article which can be covered with the foot is scarcely likely to be detected. The topics of conversation, too, may be numerous and personally interesting, even under such apparently unfavorable circumstances.

The exceptions to the system of general indulgence are the men who have attempted to escape, have assaulted an officer, or have generally misconducted themselves by refusing to work, or by defying the authorities. For the first two of these offences the culprit wears a distinguishing dress of gray and yellow, or gray and black, and are chained when at work. For the latter the punishment is separate confinement on bread and water, or, in extreme cases, the dark cell. At half-past eleven the bell calls them all to dinner. A few of the men working at a distant part of the quarry have their rations brought out to them, and dine *al fresco*. The majority, however, reassemble in the prison and dine in their cells, where they have a full hour to eat and rest, and if they please, to read the books lent them from the library on school days. At one o'clock they return to

their work, and are recalled for the night at a quarter to six, when, after a few minutes, during which they assemble for evening prayers, they once more enter their cells, receive their supper and a candle (for only the corridors and general buildings are lighted with gas, which is made on the premises), and may again amuse themselves with their books till about eight o'clock, when they go to bed, the night warders remaining on duty to watch the cells.

Once a week, on his school day, each prisoner takes a bath and has his hair cut, and they are all expected to shave three times a week. At various points upon the works there are places to which the men retreat for shelter should the weather be unfavorable; and on unmistakably wet days they are not taken out to labour at all, but remain in their cells, where they are allowed to read, the doors of the cells not being closed. On Sundays also, in the intervals between their attendance at Divine service, the doors of the cells are allowed to remain open, and detachments of the men walk in the prison-yard.

Those prisoners who have received good-conduct marks are rewarded by numerous indulgences, mostly taking the form of comfortable additions to their meals, such as baked beef, treacle pudding, and, if they prefer it, the substitution of tea for cocoa or gruel. Throughout the whole arrangements, this promotion of physical comfort seems to be the pervading principle, and even in the case of the few convicts who are consigned to Western Australia the difference of rations on board the transport-ship must at first be a serious inconvenience, to say nothing of the confined space and the more restricted liberty of a crowded vessel. As I have already been reminded, many alterations are now to be made in the administration of convict prisons, and a reduction has been proposed in

the future rations of those who are now under punishment; the total number of those who were received under sentence last year was 2848.

Amongst all the proposed alterations, however, there is one from which some very useful results may be anticipated. It is that the period of a convict's imprisonment shall be measured by the actual quantity of work which he performs, no remission being granted for 'good conduct,' which must be indispensable to entitle him to any reward for his industry, a reward which he will forfeit by subsequent misbehaviour.

Of our two criminals the fiercely stolid ruffian, who scarcely unbends those overhanging brows even with all these advantages, works with some will, and uses his hammer sometimes in a way which excites the contemptuous laughter of his companion; but he is restive and defiant—brutal in his obstinacy. It is very doubtful whether his sentence will be shortened. The other allows his hammer to work by its own weight, is smugly silent and attentive, and keeps his own counsel. He will soon be high in the prison books, and have money entered to his credit. When their respective terms of servitude expire the steward will make up their accounts, and they will be sent in charge of an officer to the place from which they were convicted; that is to say (in their case) to London and to Millbank Prison, where they will receive a dress suitable to the calling they ostensibly followed previous to their sentence, and a part of the sum which has become due to them on account of the prison gratuities. After a period of three months, and if they can produce testimony, such as a letter from the clergyman of the parish or some other respectable person, that they have been living honestly, they may receive a further instalment, and so on,

until it has all been paid. It is matter for regret that few convicts discharged with a "ticket of leave" apply for more than the second instalment of this money. This may be partially explained by the knowledge that many of them go to distant parts of the country, and that others do not wish to revive the recollections of the prison authorities or the police, but assume fresh names and fresh pursuits. But it is also too well known that a large number of them re-enter upon a course which may ultimately lead them back to the comforts of Portland Prison. It is well understood, too, that in this country, and especially in London, a discharged convict has very little chance of obtaining honest employment by which he can live comfortably ; or of keeping it even when he has obtained it, after his antecedents once become known ; and these are the significant facts which are most difficult to deal with in any earnest inquiry respecting the defects of our present system of penal servitude.

THE END.

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